January

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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Good Stories Well Told

Three
Distinctive Novelettes

"Steadfast Dunes"
by Harris Booge Peavey

"The Friend of the Family"
by Samuel Morse

"Try Your Luck"
by Sinclair Gluck

She Was Just Eighteen—

Beautiful, spirited, inheriting from her ancestors the verve and vivacity of those two great Latin races—France and Spain.

Her life, from the age of three, had been spent in a Convent in New Orleans.

And then had come the summons from the father she had never seen, to come home to that strange, storm-beaten island in the great Mississippi Delta.

With joy and expectancy in her heart she followed instructions to the letter, only to find on her arrival that—

Her Father Had Been Dead For Thirty Years.

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Dead Men Make No Music

By EDWINA LEVIN MacDONALD

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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume X Number 4

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Around the Corner

ROBERT BURNS, who was born January 25, 1759, declared in "The Cottar's Saturday Night":

Princes and lords are but the breath of kings—
An honest man's the noblest work of God.

Today this observation seems trite, hackneyed—even bromidic. It's old stuff. But when Burns wrote these and other lines expressing the same thought, his viewpoint was the direct forerunner of one perfectly good revolution and the sympathetic accompaniment to another.

One of these revolutions was staged in France and produced, among other startling things, the guillotine and Napoleon Bonaparte. The other revolution was already underway in Philadelphia and Boston and points adjacent thereto and produced George Washington and these United States of America.

Robert Burns, the ploughman, wrote the kind of poetry that was dedicated to democracy because, as he said in another of his verses:

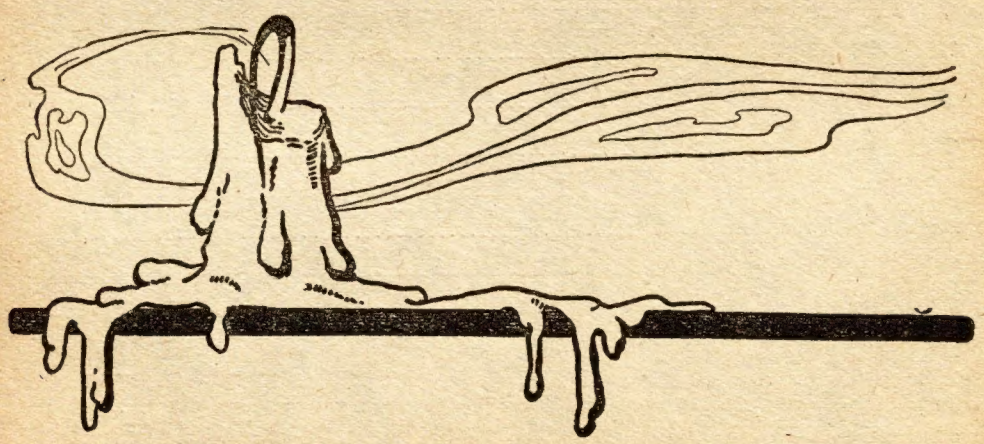
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.

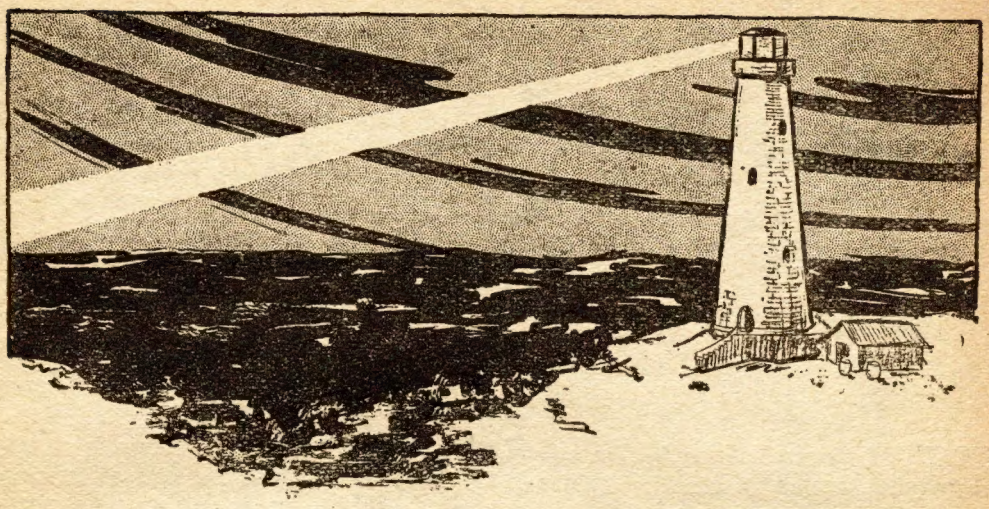
And subsequent historical events have gone far to suggest that, for sheer humanitarianism, his was the greatest voice of his time.

It would appear to be one of Nature's favorite tricks to cradle her giants among the race of men in the drabbest kind of humility. In fact, beauty leaping out of ugliness is one of her most prevalent mysteries.

The roots of the pond lily are nurtured in the green slime of sullen pools—and the oyster produces a pearl.

Burns' heritage was poverty and the plough. But while he ploughed and plucked his meagre livelihood from a grudging soil, his poet's soul leaped skyward and hung a song upon the heights.





Steadfast Dunes

By HARRIS BOOGE PEAVEY

Jealousy, fear and the sea, fringed with its great sand wastes, play important roles in this record of a human tragedy by Harris Booge Peavey. In STEADFAST DUNES you will find elemental emotions among ordinary people tearing down the little shell of civilization that they have built around themselves. Ingredients such as these are guaranteed to produce an intensely dramatic story

CHARITY leaned against the window sill and looked behind her bitterly at a crayon portrait of a woman on the wall. Her eyes beetled under her jet black hair, which was parted down the middle and drawn tight over her ears to a high knot topped by a yellow comb.

From a habit she had of pulling at her nose with thumb and forefinger it had grown long, and hung like a beak over her uneasy lips. Her gnarled fingers screwed a bulky gold band on a stubborn knuckle, and her swift breathing made the hundred little buttons up the front of her tight-waisted brown dress crawl restlessly.

A black cat curled a serpentine tail about her skirt and nudged an itching whisker across her shoe.

The boom of the sea and the failing light recalled her from the angry thoughts aroused by the portrait and she turned her wrinkled face to the window. The Light on the headland was dark.

Thomas had told her that morning that he would stop to set the Light on his way home to supper. Until the Light was lit and she knew he had re-

turned she could stay in this room of Thomas's and cherish her pent-up hatred of the woman on the wall, the wife who had preceded her.

Against the ominous green of the angry sky the Lighthouse stood out a dead white cleaving the gale that had been driving in on the land in increasing fury since early afternoon.

Sand and spume lifted over the rolling dunes and spat a tattoo on the rattling sash which was almost opaque from years of such bombardment. The Light should be lit; Thomas was late.

CHARITY pressed close to the window pane, watching for the gleam that would inform her of Thomas's return and send her from the room.

The sea had exerted an influence over her since she had been born by it those many years ago; the sea and that long line of sand dunes which formed themselves as ramparts against the onslaught of the waters.

By the sea she had grown up; it had intoned its chant at her wedding; and by it she would die.

It held her to its side as indomitably as Martha, the woman on the wall, held her hatred. She had responded to its pretense of tenderness; she felt now its austerity as she stood spellbound in the face of its wrath.

"I asked ye not to come inside here," a tired voice pleaded with her from the door.

Charity wheeled her stooped shoulders and confronted Thomas holding the lintels of the door, his clothes soaked through and dripping on the sill, bare-headed, his damp hair plastered flat.

"Come out, please," he begged her as he walked into the room, leaving wet imprints on the floor.

Charity stole a quick glance at the light.

"Ye haven't lit the Light," she whispered hoarsely, and crept from the room.

"Will ye bring me the supper here. I'd like to sit inside here this night," Thomas called after her.

He threw some sticks on the ready kindling in the woodburner and ignited the blaze, then started out to set the Light burning, but paused in the kitchen with his hand on the doorknob and gently addressed Charity's back as she bent over the stove.

"Will ye put out my black cloth suit? I fell through that rotten rail on the bridge and into Ramy's Channel. Like to drowned. Tide carried me a half mile; thought I was goin' to be took to sea; but I come ashore a ways back. I'm wet's a fish; and cold's one, too. Goin' to set the Light now," and he opened the door and pulled it to with difficulty against the gale.

Charity obeyed, resentment trembling in her limbs. She hurled the suit on the chair by the kitchen table; if it had been brittle it would have broken in her grip.

By what right did he exclude her from that room? He and his Martha! And Charity knew; and the knowledge swelled her resentment, for she knew that she alone was to blame. Clattering her pots on the stove, she recalled the time the picture of Martha had been hung.

WHEN Martha had been dead a year Charity and Thomas were married. They had lived quietly enough together in the lee of the protecting sand dunes until her unreasonable jealousy of the first wife had brought a scornful remark to her lips. She remembered she had had no cause, for Thomas had kept silent about the dead Martha.

There had been words; and a breach had appeared, and widened, until the day Thomas had quietly put up the offending portrait on the wall of that

room, and asked her to keep out; for he wanted a place where he could be alone.

The buttons on her dress front quivered as she thought of that day. She never knew why, but she had respected his request—when he was in the house.

Thomas came back while she was still stirring these recollections over the stove. He was rubbing his hands; his teeth chattered.

He picked up the dry suit and returned to his room, the cat arching its back against the leg of the table.

Charity mechanically prepared the simple meal. But she mixed with the soup a vengeful thought. She boiled in the coffee a vindictive wish. And she sliced the loaf with malicious hands.

The black apron trembled, the run-down shoes flapped on the floor. She poked her beaked nose in among the pots and stirred the steaming contents with a long spoon, a witch bending over her evil brew.

Why had she let him see that she hated Martha? She had this to remember and its very taste made the soup in the spoon bowl rank. Why did she submit to being his servant? Why did she stay with him?

The gale blew around the house, it whistled under the door, it tossed a salty tang in her nostrils, it told her subtly why she could not leave. It was the sea she could not leave—the sea and the friendly dunes. They held her with a grip she dared not test.

SHE flung aside the spoon with which she was tasting the soup, grabbed the china off its accustomed place on the kitchen table, and carried it in to his room, slapping it down venomously under the searching gaze of the woman on the wall.

In the light of the lamp, which spread a flowered china shade over the chenille cover, lay an open plush-bound family album. Facing each other on the pages thus revealed were pictures of a woman and a boy, the same woman whose face looked down from the wall.

Charity wanted to tear them out, the woman and the boy, the son of Martha and Thomas, now grown to manhood and painting pictures in a distant city.

Thomas had changed his clothes. The discarded suit lay soaking in a widening puddle by the stove.

"Will ye dry 'em in the kitchen?" he asked patiently.

She did as she was asked. The soup was hot now and she lifted the heavy pot, covered it carefully with her black apron and carried it back to him.

At the door of the room she hesitated. He sat down before the ruddy stove, his feet on the fender, the album open in his lap, gazing raptly into the eyes of his first wife, the Martha on the wall.

Charity shivered. Bringing him victuals while he sat with his family—it was more than she could bear. She wished he were dead and laid under the stones with the hateful Martha.

Her crooked fingers tightened on the steaming pot. Stealthily she advanced on him from behind his chair. The lamp shed its glow over his moist hair.

The velvet-footed shadow of the cat slid after her and thrashed its tail. The green glint from its eyes flashed wisely across Charity's vision. There seemed to be an understanding between them.

"It's right hot," she warned Thomas, still holding the pot under her apron.

"That's good," he said, gratefully. "I'm froze."

SOMETHING counseled Charity to assert her right. Perhaps it was the

urging of the green-eyed cat, tossing its swollen tail aloft.

She threw off the apron from the steaming pot, lifted it high above her and brought it down with all the force she could muster on the head of the unsuspecting Thomas.

The head rebounded spasmodically, a groan escaped from the lips, and the body slumped limply, dropping a tapping hand over the arm of the chair.

The hot soup sent up little skirls of steam from the floor. The cat leaped to a corner and licked its whisker.

Charity stood for a moment transfixed, and then dropped on her knees and looked into Thomas' face. It was empty; the last breath had fluttered from his mouth; the eyes were already cooling. He was dead.

UNDER the watchful eyes of the Martha on the wall and the accusing visages of the two encased in the album on the floor, Charity set about her task with dispatch.

Glenellen Light bent a recurrent gaze on what she had to do. She lifted the body carefully to the floor. There was but little blood where the pot had found its mark.

With a difficulty that was partly swept away by her sense of conquest, she removed the new suit of black and drew on in its place the drowned garments sizzling before the range. She left him as he lay before the ruddy stove, under the guardian eyes of the Martha on the wall.

She procured a spade and went outside where the sands of the dunes encroached on the straggling grasses.

Her hunched shoulders seemed built to dig a grave. The hole deepened and the dunes stood about her with their little tufts of beach grass, like so many men buried up to the crown of their heads.

She dug exceptionally deep because dunes are uneasy things, and known to migrate from year to year. She drove the spade into the top of a mound, and went back to Thomas, laid out in his old suit. He was a burden, but not too heavy for her sudden strength. His armpits pulled on her hands and she dragged him through the house, leaving a wet trail behind, and across to the gash in the dunes.

She went back for a sheet, and in it she wrapped her victim and lowered him into the grave. The spade worked feverishly—and the dunes were as they had been before.

She slept with a sense of accomplishment. In the morning she wiped dry the floor of the room where the soup had splashed. She glanced pridefully at the bereaved Martha on the wall, whispering a malediction on her gentle face.

On a shelf over a boarded-up fireplace three brilliant peacock feathers waved from a cheap vase, like three big eyes. She crunched them together into draggles and threw them in the cold woodburner, on the ashes of last night's fire.

A shell held its mouth invitingly open to her. She placed it to her ear and listened to the encouraging voice of the sea.

She looked on the place where the spade had plunged the night before. Already sand was stinging another contour over the grave. The dunes had taken Thomas to their depths.

HER work done, she threw a shawl about her head and trudged down the path toward the village.

She held an edge of the shawl across her mouth, and peered above it, open-eyed. She hurried past the straggling houses at the end of the village street and came to that of the doctor. She pulled the bell handle and brought him to the door.

"Thomas ain't been home a'night," she told him fearfully.

The doctor, called in any emergen-

cy, thrust his arms into a coat and accompanied her into the village. About the bridge, which joined to the mainland the spit of sand on which the houses clustered, was a group of village folk, men and women of the sea. They turned speculative eyes on Charity as she and the doctor came abreast of them.

They were contemplating a broken rail of the bridge which flung itself across Ramy's Channel. Boys were whipping the banks on either side of the Channel, and one bent now over the edge and reached for something lodged in the salty roots.

He fished it out; shook it, and came weaving his way through the tall meadow grass and handed to the doctor a soggy old felt hat, misshapen and limp.

Charity held the shawl more closely to her mouth and nodded her head.

It was his hat. The buttons on her dress moved safely under the concealing fringe of the shawl.

A sympathetic woman took her in charge and led her indoors to sit with a bowl of tea, while the men went searching both banks of the Channel for traces of Thomas.

The doctor reported sorrowfully that the search had been futile.

"No sign. The tide was running heavily last night. He might have missed his footing as he crossed in the gale. Even a powerful swimmer would have been hard put to it to make headway against that strong ebb tide. He must have been carried out to sea."

He took her hand and pressed it in sympathy.

Charity thought with exultation that the sea had been robbed this once. She hid her mouth under the lip of the teacup.

"He ain't the first that's been took to sea," condoled the woman. "And they's not a many that comes back, Charity," she added. "The sea's ragin' powerful."

The doctor brought his buggy and drove Charity back to her empty home by the Light. He helped her up the sandy path to her door and left her, with another sympathetic hand clasp, to the protection of the dunes.

She still clutched the hat. And now she bore it truculently into her kitchen and wrung it in her hands and cast it on the closet floor.

She went in to throw an exultant look at the Martha on the wall. She had a habit of looking beyond people so that they sometimes turned around, expecting to see another behind them. She now found herself looking at Martha in this way, but Martha did not turn her head. She stared back, and as though she knew what she knew, at Charity.

Charity did not fail to realize that she was safe from the suspicion that she had killed her husband, even though the Martha on the wall had seen the deed committed. The broken rail, the identified hat, the unavailing search. In the annals of the town, Thomas Doane would be set down as among the missing—lost at sea.

GLENELLEN Light was tended as before; the light-house inspector made his recommendation to permit Charity to continue in Thomas' place and she carried on, glowing over her victory. She clung to the embrace of the sea, the dunes came close to her, the winds swept security about her.

Summer and its holiday visitors came and went. The gales of autumn swooped down on the coast with recurring frequency. Charity found that a companion inhabited the house with her, an intangible comrade, only a vague thought.

This speculation occupied her days. Had Thomas really been washed to a watery grave? Had the occurrence in

his room been simply a dream? She spent much time in the room now, vituperating the helpless Martha on the wall and the album pictures of the mother and the child.

She used to go sometimes to the window at dusk, looking for the gleam from the Light, and then jerk around suddenly. Why, he was dead. He couldn't light the Light, he couldn't surprise her in the doorway.

She stood often on the cliff-head and peered far out over the treacherous sea from which she had stolen Thomas. She felt a complicity with that wave-crested power and had a guilty knowledge that she shared her secret with it. She hugged the breeze in her arms and wondered what it was that so irresistibly drew her to the sea. She stood in the sands of the dunes and took comfort in their support.

A DAY broke still and clear, after a stormy night. Charity looked about her, under her shielding hand, and saw in the sandy road at the foot of the path a buggy, and a horse stretching his nose to the ground. It was the doctor's buggy.

Charity clutched the sill of the door. Had they found Thomas's body and sent the doctor thus to inform her? But no, Thomas was safe under the sand.

The doctor labored up the shifty path and found her in the door, her black apron held close about her mouth. Was he coming for her now, at this late date, to accuse her of her crime? She was chilled to inaction.

"Get your hat, Mrs. Doane, and come with me," he said.

"Is he found?" she mumbled through her apron.

"A body washed ashore last night. We want you to identify it, if you can."

She dropped her apron corner. Thomas was dead, but could the treacherous sea have gotten at him, and thrown him back to her like this? Or had the unstable dunes drawn away from his resting place.

She pulled a hat about her ears, drew on a coat, and they climbed down the path and into the doctor's buggy.

The body lay in a shed, under a soiled canvas. Witnesses stood near. Charity approached the inert bundle with trepidation. The doctor lifted a flap of the cover from the face and she peered at the visage thus disclosed.

"Tain't him," she whispered, and shut her eyes.

"Wait!" The doctor took her hand patiently. He examined the dead man's teeth. "Thomas had a gold tooth, didn't he?"

She forced open her eyes.

"Not that side," she declared, and turned away.

He drove her home and left her relieved, because a fear had begun to annoy her—a fear that Thomas, in this or that guise, would keep cropping up to set her heart pounding.

Hadn't she dug valiantly with the spade? Hadn't she put him deep enough in his hole?

A HEAVY winter gnawed at the coast and set its icy fingers about Glenellen Light. The dunes buffeted many a gale.

Warm winds came northward and fought with the reluctant cold of the waning winter and distilled thick fogs which blanketed the shore. This made necessary the winding of heavy weights to set a clock work mechanism turning and a bell clapper tolling its message into the blur of the impenetrable fogs.

The spring came hesitantly. Charity felt the sea calling to her and the warming breezes enveloping her encouragingly. A day with a breath of summer invited an idle man to stroll

up the path toward the white spire of the Light pointing to the sky.

"H'lo, Mis' Doane," he called, and came and sat down on her step, staring out over the agitated expanses of the inner bay.

"This'd be the kind of a day Thomas'd go out there in his boat, after crabs, maybe. Wouldn't it, Mis' Doane? You know, Mis' Doane," he went on, "Jed Thurlow's kids, they said they seen Thomas out in his boat last full moon.

"They was edgin' along out of a creek, and his boat, so they said, sailed past 'em, and there, a-settin' in the starn, was Thomas, as big as life, a-leanin' over the tiller, a-lookin' out over the bow.

"Them kids was scared, they was, and they sculled home's fast 's they could. Told their daddy it must a-been Thomas's ghost."

The man ruminated.

"But pshaw, they ain't any ghosts, be they, Mis' Doane?"

He twisted in his seat to peer up questioningly at her. The apron swished quickly to her lips. And then it was tossed away and she pulled a broom from inside the door and began to sweep invisible dust from the stoop. The cat looked on approvingly from the door-step.

"Get along now, you Esau, you and your childers' tales. I got my work to do. Can't stop here a-chatterin' with ye."

But she could not hide from the indolent Esau her belief in ghosts, her credence in the tale of the silent sailor pulling his spectral sheet before the breeze. And thus the town had assurance enough that Thomas' wraith did go about of nights, tacking here and there in the moonlight.

CHARITY had another task to perform now, once the Light was kindled in its pinnacle, and she set herself to it fearsomely those clear nights that found the bay plainly discernible from shore to shore.

On the stoop, her shielding hand held close above her eyes, the black apron blowing fitfully about the hem of her dress, she stood and swept her gaze over the broad lay of the water, seeking for a misty sail which left no ripple in its wake.

Her eyes grew keen from constant searching. Sometimes she thought she could descry a phantom sail, skimming shadowless and without disturbing the waters of the bay. Then her head would drop and she would hurry inside and hold the door with bated breath as she locked and barred it.

She would not have Thomas back, wet as he might be from his midnight sail.

She would climb hastily into bed, wrapped in an all enveloping night gown, her black head tied in a night cap. And the sea would whisper to her and the salt sweet taste of it linger on her lips and she would be quiet. She would sleep with the thought of the faithful dunes hemming her around with security.

The light gleamed steadily and a still, warm summer began its reign, and the bay became populous with the craft of the summer residents.

ONE GLARING morning a man climbed the path to where Charity stood with her visoring hand, the cat leaning against her skirt. He lugged a suitcase in each hand. It was Richard, the boy of the album, the son of Martha and Thomas, come again on one of his infrequent visits.

He was fair and he was youthful, and this color of youth stood out in vivid contrast to the black shine of Charity's head, the sombre color of her apron with the plush fur of the cat rubbing across her shoe tops. A smile lurked around Richard's mouth and in the corners of his eyes; his teeth shone white in the sun.

He dropped the suit-case before the steps and mopped his face.

"Come down to paint a picture, Charity," he explained, as he picked up his bags and edged past her into the house.

"Folk's down here say they've been seeing Dad out nights in his old boat. D' you ever see him, Charity?"

"Lies," she cried, and he smiled at her vehemence, and at the arching back of the cat.

"Then you don't believe in ghosts, do you, Charity? That's right. It's only superstitious people who believe in ghosts."

He carried his bags into his father's room, with Charity at his heels. He began to open them and lay out his clothes on the bed.

Charity was on the point of remonstrating. She didn't want him here in the house. But something kept her from objecting. It was her house, wasn't it?

The waves broke softly on the beach below the cliffs; they seemed to caution Charity to be patient—the breaking waves and the sand sifting along the dunes.

So he had heard that story about the ghost too. But he didn't believe it. He was whistling noisily while he unpacked.

"How long ye goin' to stay?" she inquired, ungraciously.

"Not long, Charity. Just going to make a few sketches. I wish Dad were here. I'd like to paint him as he used to sit out in front on the dunes whittling on an old stick. Make a great picture."

Charity caught her breath, and then rejoiced inwardly at the recollection that Thomas' whittling days were over.

"Maybe I'll paint him as he used to sit in that boat of his, like they say his ghost does now," Richard continued, busily arranging his belongings about the room.

He studied the picture of his mother on the wall. And then he turned with a smile to Charity, apparently amused at the story of the ghostly sailor.

She went on about her work, her stepson continuing to whistle shrilly. A picture of Thomas, sitting out on the dunes! She recalled savagely her victory over Thomas. The sense of conquest that she had felt as she flung the spadefuls of sand over him still surged through her veins. He could not sit any more idly among the dunes and whittle foolish shavings.

She went outside and around the house to be sure the dunes were still unchanged. A night had been known to cover their mysterious movements—dunes were uneasy things.

RICHARD came out to stroll along the shore and, when he had gone some distance, Charity hurried to reconnoiter in the room. It was true; he had brought his artists' materials. Perhaps he was going to paint pictures. But Charity had a vague idea he had a less innocent purpose in forcing himself upon her.

Had he been unsatisfied with the explanation of his father's death? This vague suspicion made her glance blackly at Martha.

He had been running through the pages in the old album. It lay, as so often it had done in his father's lifetime, open on the table. It exposed the picture of Richard as a child facing his mother across the page.

Charity shut it with a bang, and went out to see where Richard had wandered. He stood near the house gazing earnestly at the rising dunes, and the sea beyond. Charity plodded to his side, unquiet, fearful.

"What d'ye see?" she asked, squinting her eyes under her palm.

"Been looking about for a good picture. Think I've got it now. Those dunes there," and he pointed, "with

the sea in the distance. That will make a fine background."

Charity dug her toes deep to hold her balance. Richard had pointed directly over the resting place of his father!

HE ATE of the simple food that noon and puffed a dilapidated pipe at which Charity sniffed critically.

"They say he sails only in the moonlight, Charity. Didn't you ever see him?"

She was stirring a mixture at the stove; the handle of the pot felt strong in her fingers.

"I don't take up with such like trash," she responded, and churned so vigorously that the contents of the pot splashed over and hissed on the hot stove.

"I'll try tonight if I can see him myself," he announced, smiling quizzically at her, and she pulled her nose a fraction longer with her thumb and forefinger.

He set his easel up outside that afternoon and began blocking in the light foundation lines of his picture.

Charity worked with a trembling anxiety and several times interrupted her duties to go to the window in his room and look out at him absorbed in his work. She got an impression she could not dismiss from her mind that his apparent industry cloaked a more sinister purpose than he had divulged to her.

Finally she went outdoors to watch him at his work. He paid but little attention to her. He was deftly touching charcoal here and there, and erasing and inserting new lines. To Charity it seemed that he was giving particular attention to the very dune under which Thomas lay.

The days passed in this manner, with Richard working many hours at his task, and Charity watching him surreptitiously from the window until she could stifle her curiosity no longer and was drawn outside to scrutinize what progress he was making.

The picture took form; the fatal dune came into more prominence. Did he suspect? But he couldn't. The broken rail, the identified hat, the unavailing search.

The picture was nearing completion, she thought. Perhaps he would soon be gone. She felt then that she would like to go away herself, but the sea and the sand dunes and the breeze with its salt tang held her close. That and the secret they shared with her.

She could not go. Not even with this young man in the house, painting his picture of the grave. No, this was her life; the sea, the temptress, held by her side.

HE CLIMBED into the small attic one day and Charity followed him in haste. What was he doing?

Just poking around, he said, and smiled suspiciously. But she kept with him and saw him go to his room emptyhanded, and heard him whistling to himself.

She hesitated and then went in to him.

"What did ye want up there?" she questioned him.

"Looking for some of Dad's clothes . . ."

"They was took with him," she interrupted him,

"That's right. All except the hat, you know, Charity. Might put him in the picture; and the clothes would help."

"I throwed the hat away," she hastened to explain.

She left him and climbed again into the attic, peered among the trunks and boxes; pushed them impatiently, seeking the reason for his visit. But she was sure she knew. He suspected her!

The cat went with her, noiselessly as velvet, flattening its cheeks against the clutter of the room.

Richard joined her sometimes at night as she scanned the bay, and with her he searched for the sailing ghost. His presence became less endurable to her; it filled her with a nameless dread. Would he never go?

"I can't see him, can you, Charity?" he appealed to her, looking oddly at her.

She left him unanswered on the little porch, and sought refuge in bed.

CHARITY sat the next day at her kitchen table and thumbed the pages of her Bible. Richard came in to her, his fingers greasy and stained with color.

"Charity, it seems strange to me that Dad could have fallen through that bridge, knowing his way around here as well as he did."

"They never found the body."

"I know, but it doesn't seem like him. Now does it?"

"They found the hat."

Richard went on to his room, perplexed.

Charity read again in the Psalms.

"Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth."

She was gripped by the words. The tip of her nose caught between her ever-ready finger and thumb.

Did not this revelation confirm her fears? Did this not foretell a treacherous moving of the dunes to discover to Richard her crime of which until now she had felt so free from being suspected?

Charity read no further.

A wind came off the sea that night. It fanned the land gently, at first. But through the night it gained steadily in volume until by early morning it had reached the proportions of a gale. The house creaked more and more protestingly, as though bending a weakening shoulder toward this fierce bombardment.

"Because he was wroth." Charity remembered the very words.

The oncoming storm brought no consolation to Charity in her bed. To her the shrieking voices of the tempest seemed to cry a warning that her secret was less secure. She lay uneasily on her pillow, listening to the hoarse lullaby of the storm. The restless dunes were proving an uncomfortable resting place.

In the midst of the clatter besieging the house the following morning Richard wandered between his room and the kitchen, gazing crestfallen into the storm outside. His work was being delayed.

"It must have been like this the night Dad fell off the bridge. But still I don't see how he happened to do it."

Charity swabbed at her sink, the spatter in her dish pan drowned by the whistling around the house. The mole on a corner of her chin took on a darker hue.

"He stood into many a wind stronger as this one now that ye'd think 'd tear the house down. But that was a dark night. And the rail was broke. Ought to have been fixed before."

Charity gripped the pot handle on the stove and trembled so that the pot clattered. The cat swelled and an undulation of bristling fur ran along its back.

"Ye think someone pushed him off, do ye?"

Richard turned to her with surprise.

"No," he said, slowly. "But it was an incredible thing to happen to Dad."

Charity could have bitten her tongue off. The few teeth she had clamped down on it until the perspiration spread over her face.

SHE COWERED under her bedclothes that night, the cap pulled

tight about her chin. The voice of the storm that still raged warned her more urgently. She must rid herself of Richard.

His doubts were getting too numerous for her, and she could not trust her tongue. If he went on nagging her, she might tell him more than she meant to. Richard must go.

By morning the storm showed signs of having spent its greatest fury, though it still blew at hurricane speed and shook the house to its foundations. But there began to be more frequent periods of less intensity in the strength of the wind.

It was surprising that no rain had fallen. What water had come ashore had been blown from the tops of the curling breakers as they tumbled on the beach below.

Charity sat in an empty kitchen when Richard came to his dinner the next noon. A man could be starved out.

"Dinner not ready, Charity?"

Charity sat silent for an interval before answering.

"There ain't goin' to be no dinner."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I ain't goin' to cook no more for ye."

Richard groaned in annoyance.

"I've nearly finished. I'll be leaving you soon."

"No." She sat adamant. "I got enough to do tending the light and fixin' my own meals, without runnin' around pickin' up after you, besides all the extra work ye make in this kitchen."

He walked about the room, watching her closely, and approached the door to a cupboard and pulled it open.

"Then I'll have to get my own food," he said.

Charity rose with alacrity and pushed him away from the shelves, shutting the door and standing before it.

"Get out of here," she cried.

He took her shoulder to set her aside, as he could have done easily. But she fought, her muscles tensed with the strength of fear, and he let himself be pushed out of the kitchen.

"All right," called. "I'll go get something to eat. The wind's down enough so I can get into the village."

Throwing on a slicker, he hurried off and in time returned, a paper bag spotted with grease clutched in his hand.

"See," he said, "you can't get rid of me so easily. You can't starve me out."

Charity was between him and the door to his room. He pushed past her on the way. Charity mumbled and ran after him and placed herself in front of him.

He roughly brushed her aside and reached his door, but she followed stumbling, and fell against him. She leaned weakly against the wall and let him pass.

He put the bag on the table and knelt before a box of paint tubes. His back was toward her as his father's had been that other time.

She raised her arms impotently and made as if to run at him. But the arms came down and she leaned limply against the wall. He still knelt before the box.

CHARITY staggered slowly back to her kitchen. Confusedly she went through motions until she found herself groping among the pots on the stove.

With startling suddenness her strength and resolution returned to her. It was the pot-handle, the same one she had gripped the night she had battered Thomas to his death, that gave her back her vigor.

She gripped it until it seemed as though it had become almost a part of herself, and then she slid noiselessly back to Richard's room.

He was in the same position, kneeling before the box. She stealthily lifted the pot on high, as it had once been lifted before, and moved toward the bent head of Richard.

A board creaked, and Richard turned a wondering face to her. In the half-light of the room he could not see the frenzy written on her face.

"What's the matter, Charity? Want your pot mended?"

The fingers loosed their grip, the arms came down. Her resolve and strength deserted her.

"Nothing," she whispered, and left him.

She fell into a chair in the kitchen and wiped her face dry with her black apron. What had she been going to do? She could not bury Richard as she had his father, and rely on a broken rail and a wet hat to protect her from the penalty of her crime.

She fell limply into her bed that night and breathed stertorously, but the warnings of the storm had ceased and the quiet that prevailed soothed her in some degree.

Morning broke clear and still, with a bright sun. Richard took his easel out again, and fell energetically to making up for lost time.

With the passing of the storm the danger of detection seemed to have faded away. Charity was once more herself. She prepared Richard's meals again.

WHEN the dishes from the noon dinner were cleared away, she went out to see how the picture was progressing.

It stood nearly completed on the easel, but sailing jauntily on the painted ocean was a misty boat.

"What ye got the boat in for?" she asked.

Richard stood away to look critically at his picture.

"Thought I might call it 'The Phantom Sail.' You know, the one Dad's ghost goes about in."

Charity steadied herself.

"Guess they ain't no ghosts."

"Of course there aren't, but it wouldn't look bad in a picture."

Charity studied the picture intently.

"Seems ye hain't got it just right. Them dunes there, they ain't that way."

"I know," said Richard, impatiently. "And I can't seem to get them right. The storm's twisted them all around. Look how they've crawled away."

Charity was as though turned to stone. Outwardly she stood calmly at his side, but the rampant fear in her would have made her totter if the rigidity of her body had not held her inflexibly in the sand. The buttons down the front of her dress were still because her heart had almost stopped beating. The dunes had moved!

THE DUNES were traitors! All the protestations that had been made to her so subtly availed nothing. They, who had assured her they would keep her secret, had turned upon her. The fierce gale had blown treachery in upon the shore.

She stood abandoned by the only friends she knew. The security that had become more permanent with the passage of time had all been dissipated.

"I'll have to finish the picture from memory," Richard's voice interrupted her as though from afar.

The blood began again to course in Charity's veins. Now she stood alone. The support of the dunes was withdrawn. But they had not succeeded yet in disclosing the resting-place of Thomas, in spite of the vociferous efforts of their ally, the wind.

Charity thought swiftly. She saw herself again as she plied the spade;

a spade again could put the dunes in their rightful place. Her mind rasped at the suggestion.

So dry were her lips that she could barely force herself to speak. The words came with an unwonted precision, but Richard seemed unaware of it.

"Ye could perhaps dig the dunes back," she said sharply to him.

He thought a while.

"It would be a big job."

"I'd help ye."

"It might be done," he admitted.

He entered into the work with little enthusiasm. But Charity was possessed with a sudden energy, an interest in the matter that was not brought on by her desire to see the successful completion of the picture.

Perhaps her keen desire to help him move the dunes puzzled him. It was she who brought the two spades and put one in his hand.

THE treacherous dunes! Charity dug her spade more viciously than she had that other time when she had attacked them alone. Then they had been her friends. Now they were her declared enemies; and she was going to conquer them.

The thought of this victory, of putting the dunes in their place, spurred her to a fevered state of activity. She plunged her spade into the whipped sand with venom, and threw the piles back where they belonged. Steadily, steadily, but surely, the dunes moved back, impelled by the strength of a furious antogonist.

Richard stopped occasionally to mop his face and look at her, and then, as he watched her frantic motions, his eyes opened and he pursed his lips admiringly. She did not have to wipe her face. The heat of her ardor quickly burned away the perspiration her labor provoked.

Steadily spadefuls of sand fell on the spot under which Thomas lay, steadily the mound grew higher, and the dunes took on the shape Charity would have them retain.

FINALLY Richard rested on the handle of his spade.

"Looks to me as though the job were done," he said.

Charity went on rhythmically. Again and again her spade dug into the compact sand. A depression showed where she stood. The job was done, but she was going to do it with a vengeance.

"They're going back where they belong. I'll make sure this time," she said.

"But you've dug enough back now, Charity."

"I want to make sure."

Another spadeful! Richard threw down his spade and came to her. Another spadeful! Then her spade caught something that almost threw her off her balance.

She dug deeper, pulled and hauled, and, clinging to the corner of the spade, she dragged up a piece of cloth. It trailed down into the sand, wet and stained, and the more Charity tried to disentangle her spade from it, the more it pulled away and disclosed what lay beneath.

"What's that?" Richard shouted.

But he knew, and Charity knew, for the cloth revealed where Thomas had been entombed. Charity dropped to her knees and Richard gripped her shoulder implacably.

The dunes had done their best. They had spread themselves ever higher over Thomas's grave. They had been true to the end. It was her unreasoning doubt of their friendship that had wrought her undoing.

The black cat which had been an indifferent spectator of these proceedings slunk away with a lowered tail.

The Legacy

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

YOU wouldn't be likely to say that Thorpe-Michael was the sort of place for anything unkind to happen in. A most beautiful spot sure enough. A proper flower-garden of apple-blooms in springtime, and come autumn a nest of apples, the scent of 'em grateful to the nose at every turn.

The village lies in a comb by Dart river, and the hills roll roundabout clothed with forest and fertile lands while the estuary opens out beneath. And them as live down below at water's edge can sometimes see the salmon leaping not twenty yards from their garden palings.

And not only beautiful is Thorpe-Michael: we be famous also, you may say; for there's a yew tree in the church-yard most mightily renowned among the understanding people as care for such things.

This here hugeous tree is the largest yew but one in all England, and where t'other is I do not know; but I'll lay my life it ain't such a brave tree as ours. For ours, though pretty near as old as Christianity, I shouldn't wonder, do still keep a fine figure and swells up in his greatness full of life and joy.

A yew ain't what you might call a gay tree exactly, else we shouldn't plant 'em over the sleeping ones; but our grand old chap, though a solemn sight, towers into the sky and praises the Lord so cheerful as a spring flower; and come May he's all twinkling with young green again, while at autumn time he's alive with the yellow song thrushes and screech thrushes that come to eat his harvest of ruby-red fruits.

His great arms stretch out on every side and they be propped around him, like the young men held

up the arms of the prophet; and a score of men and women lie in their graves beneath his outflung limbs. He rises half so high as the church tower itself and be near so old by all accounts; and I dwell on the fine creature because he comes a good bit into this fearful tale of Abednego Bragg.

They say every village have got its oldest inhabitant and its famous drunkard and its leading lunatic, but I don't know.

As for Thorpe-Michael there's always a good few old men up home ninety years old or more and they'll wrangle sometimes which is the most ancient among 'em. But 'tis often buried in history and none can be sure; while as for drunkards, if you might say there was a leader among 'em at this time, I dare say Miss Goodridge would have taken the palm. But though an interesting and fearless character, she don't belong in this affair; whereas Abednego Bragg be the principal part of it.

A LOONY he was and the doctors all agreed on the subject; but they liked him a lot better than the sanest amongst us and he had one very stout champion and well-wisher to his dying day. And that was Weston Churchward, the sexton.

Weston's father, William Churchward, had been Mr. Bragg's lifelong friend and when he was took, after saving Abednego's life, the afflicted man wept beside his grave for a week and wouldn't be comforted. But then he cheered up and turned his affection onto Weston, who succeeded his father as our parish grave-digger.

Young Churchward was a man thirty years old when his parent dropped; a very fine, simple type of character he was, far ways simpler-minded really than Mr. Bragg; but 'twas just the difference between being all there and being queer, and though Abednego had far more brains in his little finger than most of the folk around him, they was tainted brains, you understand. So the fools thanked God that they was saner than him.

He hadn't always been like that, for the cloud descended on him ten years after he married Betty Soper; and, of course, if she had thought such a thing was likely, she would have declined him. But at forty he married her and at fifty 'twas seen that the bats had got in his belfry; and Betty was a lot sorrier for herself than for her husband and made a deal of noise about it.

They had no family, by good chance, but lived down by the waterside, and Abednego did use to have a little steam launch and do a bit of trade to Dartmouth. In fact, he prospered well and saved a lot of money, and when he got queer, Betty had the doctor first and the lawyer after and made all secure for herself.

She was a tonguer and a driving creature without much milk of human kindness to her, but none could bring home no bad deed against her, though some, who knew her husband in his palmy days, always said she fretted him cruel, being a mean and close woman and a bit of a humbug and cruel, fond of keeping the outside of the platter clean and bright to catch her neighbors' eyes. But when she heard that nought was to be feared from Abednego, she didn't put him away but told her friends 'twas a cross from the Lord and must be borne according.

In fact she liked being a martyr and wore out the people's patience prattling about it; because the truth was otherwise. Her husband did most of the housework and minded the garden, where signs of his queer-

ness appeared, because he'd mix flowers and vegetables and have sweet peas ramping with the runner beans and marigolds along with the potatoes and little touches like that; but there weren't a speck of danger about him and she seldom heard his voice. A meek and mild fashion of man, who hid his heart.

What Betty did dread, however, at first was about the money, because Abednego had always been an open-handed man and along with his madness there came a sort of generosity that went to extremes.

And so she had the lawyer again and got his income and savings made over to her and satisfied herself the law wouldn't suffer him to write no will against her. Because he didn't like his wife very much now. In fact, he rather turned against the woman, being quite sane enough at his worst to know she regarded him as a cross from God and no more.

And when a chap feels that his better half regards him in that light, 'tis only human nature, whether he's sane or lunatic, that he should lose his admiration for the woman.

Because, you understand, poor Bragg was quite sane enough to know he was insane. And that's the hardest case, where a man with a good brain be aware the Lord have poked His Almighty Finger into the works and made him different from other people.

He'd tell the neighbors quite quietly that 'twas a most ill convenient thing being mad, and he wouldn't have had it happen on no account if he could have helped it. And so sensible would he often be, sitting at the Church House Inn taking his little drop of a night, that many, John Mason, the publican, included, often vowed he was as sane as the best and wittier than most at that.

But then would come the signs of his fatal weakness and he'd talk nonsense and utter vain things, such as his wife was turning into a spider under his eyes, or that he'd marked the apple trees was all bearing pears this year and so on.

BUT HE clove to his old friend William Churchward and he always said, with some truth, that he'd been the death of William and owed a great debt to his family. You see, he took William for a last run in his little launch afore it was sold, and out on the river poor Bragg went overboard to drown, because the thought of giving up his boat was terrible to him.

And William Churchward, though a pretty old man, jumped in and saved his friend at cost to himself, because, though the loony was no worse for the adventure, Churchward catched a chill of it and died six weeks later.

And afterwards Abednego always swore he fell in by accident and had no intention to take his life; but the doctors told Betty there was little doubt he'd done it a-purpose and must be watched according.

Anyway, William went home and his son Weston was lifted to his place of sexton, and Bragg mourned so fearful that Betty had to threaten him with the asylum. Then he took on the new young sexton for his dearest friend and poured out his heart upon him.

He dogged Weston Churchward like his shadow and spent most of his time beside him. To the churchyard he'd go by the hour, helping Weston at his work, and the youth, well knowing how his father had cared a lot for Abednego, accepted his friendship and was always patient and kind.

Bragg would help him dig the graves and keep the yard decent and in order; and sometimes, in a dark

mood, he'd sit and look over the estuary, spread shining beyond the burying-ground, and wonder where his launch was working now.

He always grew his best flowers for William Churchward's grave and always kept it gay; and he'd had a hand in the memorial stone also and made his wife give him a five-pound note out of her hoard to put toward it. She little liked doing so, but he made her.

They was very well off and Betty, mistrusting investments, kept the money for the most part hid in her own secret places. She was a good bit of a miser and liked better to touch it over sometimes than put it beyond reach to goody for her.

But there was a few thousand out to interest, where the lawyer bade her let it bide, and she lived hard for choice and piled up in secret against the day her husband should be called.

She was ten years younger than him and blessed with a tough constitution, so she hoped for years of freedom and peace and prosperity for her later time. And meantime she fattened on her martyrdom.

A handsome woman she was with a fine appearance and a pleasant voice and clean as a new pin; but though her voice was gentle, her mouth was bitter hard and so were her gray eyes also.

SHE'D got a niece in her charge, so handsome as herself, and though outwardly friendly, they were too similar to neighbor much. But then an interesting thing happened and Milly Brimblecombe, Betty's orphan niece, fell in love with the grave-digger and Weston fell in love with her.

They'd thought it all out, you see, and made their plans very clever; but it so happened that what they thought was good, neither Bragg nor his wife much approved. While Betty was stubborn on the matter, however, Abednego showed himself open to conviction. He talked with the grave-digger, who happened one morn to be opening a pit for a baby, and while Weston dug he explained the situation.

"Your wife have got a down on Milly," he said; "and she have got a down on me also. And everything us do or think upon is wrong. First she won't agree to the match, because she reckons her niece didn't ought to marry such a poor man as me; and next she strongly objects to our plans; though why for she wants to keep Milly near her I couldn't say, for she don't feel no friendship for her."

"I'm sorry for your plans also," said the older man. "I'm very sorry indeed you're minded to go foreign, and leave England and me, Weston. Because, if you and Milly go, there's nobody else in the world I care a wren's feather for on earth."

"But you wouldn't stand in my way, Mr. Bragg—I know that. And Milly Brimblecombe's even more set on it than me. She'd dearly love to get off to Canada and begin a new life there, and I feel called to it likewise, because I'm properly fed up with digging people's graves and, even so, there's cruel small money to it. But if I was to fetch off to the West, I'd get State-aided and farm a bit of land and so on."

"You can't go because you've got nought," explained Abednego. "A man must have a little money on his side if the State aids him. And Milly's got nought either, and if she crosses my wife, she'll always have nought, because Mrs. Bragg be the only person that can be looked to for her.

"For my part I like Milly very well and would pleasure her so far as marriage with you is concerned,

and I'd like for you to have her. She's a pretty girl with my wife's sense, but a much kinder and nicer woman that Mrs. Bragg."

"I suppose if we consented to bide here, so as me and you should meet every day, you wouldn't feel inclined to lend me a hand?" asked young Churchward. "'Tis only an idea, but I can't help feeling that if I was able to say to your wife I'd got a tiny bit of money on my side, she'd feel kinder to the match.

"Of course, Milly's of age and I can wed her if she's willing, but I don't want to turn her aunt from her, and if I could talk of a bit saved, then the match might go through and her future hopes of her aunt not be lost. I'm telling you what Milly herself said to me."

Mr. Bragg grinned at that.

"Milly's a downy one," he said, "but she ain't so downy as Mrs. Bragg. However, the cleverness of a sane woman be nought against the cleverness of a mad man. You see how 'tis with me, Weston. I be cracked, and the rights of a cracked man to his money be took from him. Therefore, I can't put my hands on no fortune for you in secret, because I be deprived of control. But this you understand, even a loony like me have his duty to do as he sees it, and I'm under a great debt to your family because your dear father, my lifelong friend, saved my life and lost his own in doing so. Therefore, you will be my law in a manner of speaking, and though I should be cruel sorry to part from you, yet the pleasure of serving your father's son would be greater than the sorrow of seeing you go away."

"I'd bide if that was the only way to get her," said Churchward, "but I do feel that I'd make good and justify myself better along with Milly in a new world. We're strong and full of work and ain't got no vices, Mr. Bragg, and she's told me herself she'd sooner see me fighting a big fight in foreign parts than just poking about here doing old man's work."

MILLY BRIMBLECOMBE had joined them herself as he spoke. She lived along with Abednego and his wife, and she'd come up from home to bid her uncle return for dinner. She was a strapping brown girl, powerful as a pony—a strong nature and plenty of character and sense.

"Of course!" she said. "What woman wants to see her future husband digging graves for babies? Let some ancient chap do that work. If us could break away — Dinner's ready, Uncle Bed."

For "Bed" was what his family called Mr. Bragg.

He listened to 'em and hid his heart according to his custom. He had already turned over the problem pretty oft and let his own wishes come between him and a decision. But, madman like, he'd wander away from the point and forget it between-times.

Now he spoke to 'em.

"Thoughts be moving in me," he said, "and I shouldn't wonder if your father came to see me and have a tell about it tonight. He'll come sometimes in the dark hours, but a ghost can't stand daylight and the nights be so short now he haven't shown up of late. But mind this: In justice and duty I put your good afore mine, Weston, and once I be minded to pleasure you, the thing will happen. There's no withstanding a madman's brain if he wills to use it."

Milly laughed and kissed him, because she was very fond of him and knew, for all his queerness, he loved her and Weston and wished them well.

"We'll hatch a fine plot against

Aunt Betty, my old dear," she said. "If you be on our side, we'll over-get her somehow."

"Don't vex her, however," urged Weston Churchward, "because the main chance for Milly lies with her."

"The woman must be circumvented if it can be done," declared Abednego thoughtfully. He scratched in his little beard and lifted his brown, wild-looking eyes to the tree-tops.

"I'll pour out my brain on the subject," he said, "and I shan't want no help from you, Milly. Us mad intellects always work in secrecy and single-handed."

"Don't you do nothing rash, Bed," urged the young man. But Mr. Bragg was not listening to him. He turned to his wife's niece.

"I shan't want no dinner today," he said. "I'll bide here and do some thinking."

THEY talked a few minutes longer. Then the church clock struck noon and Weston put down his spade and the lovers drifted away together; while the old man went to a low corner in the shadow of the great yew and sat down on the ivy which trailed there.

One third of his days was spent on this spot, because there was the appointed place for his own grave when the time came. It stood alongside the tombs of his parents and others of the Bragg race as had went to ground there years without count; and now he was the last of 'em and had it under the Vicar's promise that he should lie there. And his mind worked so terrible curious that he'd lay a flower there sometimes; because he well knew that, when he was gone, nobody else ever would.

He'd had one of his curious talks with his wife about it in the past.

"Mind, I don't want you to go in along with me," he told her. "You can be teeled some place else in your turn. Us have had more'n enough of each other, and there's no call to wait the last trump underground together. And I warn you, if you come down to me, I'll be nasty about it."

"Don't you fear," she said. "I wouldn't lie under that thickly, gashly yew for a fortune, and know it was poking its roots under my dead ribs."

"There's worse things poke under a man's ribs when he's living than can do so when he's dead," answered Abednego. "And I'd sooner neighbor with a tree's roots than your bones."

Then Betty laughed, for such talk never left no sting.

And now, sitting here on his future grave, the loony furrowed his forehead and thought of the situation and his duty toward it. None ever knew how his brains worked that day, or how he got the terrible strange ideas that came to him; but, be it as it will, there's no manner of doubt he cut the knot very much to his own satisfaction, and when Weston came back to finish his work an hour later, he found Abednego still sitting with his back against the yew tree and his long, thin legs stretched out in front of him.

"You'll be leery," he said. "I'd go home and have something to eat if I was you."

"Yes, I'll go home," answered Bragg. "I certainly will go home, my fine lad!"

He took his pipe out of his pocket and asked for some tobacco.

"My allowance be spent," he said, "and my wife won't hand me no more money till Saturday."

"You give your money away to the children," answered Churchward, "and then you run short."

"I've never yet found, however, that the neighbors deny me a fill. And if them be blessed who give a cup of cold water, how much more them who spare a pipe of tobacco!" answered Mr. Bragg.

He smoked for a bit and then spoke again.

"The old yew tree have given me a wrinkle," he said. "Oftentimes you'll find, when you can't go to man with your troubles, you can take 'em to a beast, or a tree. Such things have power, but only the likes of me know that power. Their voices be hid from you reasoning creatures; but I hear 'em. A cow have told me things hidden from every ear but mine and God's."

"You go home and have your dinner, Bed, and don't you worry about me and Milly. Us be young and strong and can fight our own battles," said Weston.

"Fear nothing," answered Mr. Bragg. "Fear nothing at all, Churchward. Me and the yew tree be a powerful pair, and you can take it from me that your father's spectrum, when next I view the man, will be on our side also. Good work! Good work!"

He wandered away and left the grave-digger perturbed because Weston always felt anxious when Bragg got in a wild mood.

Yet when Abednego came to the churchyard next morning with a bunch of bluebells for William Churchward's grave, he was calm and sensible and collected. He spoke no more of Weston's affairs and the younger man was careful not to mention 'em.

A little funeral party came to bury the baby and Mr. Bragg mourned and wept beside the parents of the dead. For he never missed a funeral if he could help it and behaved most orderly at 'em.

IT WAS left like that for a bit and Abednego bade Milly to keep patient a little longer and pay no heed to her aunt, or anybody else. He went about full of mystery, but was more to home than usual, because the garden called him, and understanding the ways of growing things very well, he was always forehanded, so that Mrs. Bragg never had no call to grumble for lack of vegetables the year round.

A FORTNIGHT later the crash come and it fell like lightning from a blue sky, you might say, because nothing seemed less likely to happen. Abednego had been more than usual amiable and more than usual intelligent.

In fact, life had gone very sweet in the spring weather and he hadn't crossed Mrs. Bragg nor yet given trouble or said a sharp word.

Then came a day in late June when she and her niece went along with the Sunday School children for their annual out, and they was off by eight o'clock in the morning in two gert four-hoss brakes to Dartmoor, and the festive party didn't come home along till nine of the night.

The people collected outside the "Church House" Inn as usual to see the merry-makers return; but Betty missed her husband, though she'd counted on him to be there. He weren't, however, nor was he home, either.

He'd got the fire burning and their supper hotted and the table laid; but they couldn't make him hear in house or garden and the hours passed till 'twas on midnight and yet no sign of him.

So Betty sent Milly to the police station and wondered if her cross was took off at last; and then, going as her custom was of a night to look at her money she had the shock of her life and found somebody was there afore her.

She screamed, but there wasn't none to hear, and then she steadied down and went to one or two other secret places unknown to all but her. Or so she fondly thought. Fingers had been there, too; and in ten minutes, or less, the woman discovered that thieves had raked at her cubby-

holes and took very nigh two thousand pounds in paper money.

Her mind moved quick then and afore Milly was back she judged that her husband had watched her with the cunning of a lunatic and knew her hoarding places and was now off and away with near half the money she'd got in the world.

THE INSPECTOR of police came down with Milly to waterside a bit after and she explained the state of the case so well as her nerves would let her.

"He's stole every penny in the house," she said, "and he's mitched off with it; and 'tis up to you to blaze it abroad and get hold of the man afore sane people have robbed him. That's how I read it."

But Inspector Foster weren't so sure. The police don't like theories to be thrust upon 'em. They're better pleased to make their own; and when the Inspector had heard her tale, he doubted.

"'Tis well known," he said, "you like to keep a lot too much money by you, and until we know wiser, we mustn't say Mr. Bragg took it. Because why should he take his own?

"A lot of things might have happened down here. Thieves might have broke in when his back was turned, or they might have found him on the spot and silenced him. He may be gone dead trying to defend the money! Or he may be following the robbers.

"Owing to his weak mind there's great difficulties before us; but I wouldn't say the man's robbed his home, because his madness be little like to take such a shape as that."

But Betty felt in no doubt whatever.

"Thieves would never have found it if they'd turned the house out of windows," she said. "He must have kept a watch on me and nosed it out."

She showed him where the rolls of money was hid—under a board in her bedroom floor and in a tin canister behind the wash-house boiler. And looking round with his policeman's eyes he found half a dozen "Bradburys" as had fallen and not been marked.

"He may have took it, or he may not," said Foster, "but I'll raise the hue and cry this instant moment up and down the country, and I'll be here again in an hour or two with Constable Bob Saunders, who is a very clever man and marked for preferment."

So he went off and the women ran round to the neighbors for information, but none had seen no strangers and none had seen Abednego since the morning, neither.

INSPECTOR sent off his messages and came back to Mrs. Bragg with Saunders—a very promising man at a crime though, thank God, he didn't get much practice in Thorpe-Michael. And he set to work but found nought more than a cut rope in the back yard of the premises.

Milly said it was a clothes-line and they found that it had been severed and half was gone. And Saunders, he guessed that threw light, for he was of the Inspector's mind, that Bragg had tackled the robbers and been roped and carried away.

There weren't no sign of any fight, however, and come morning, which dawned early, they had a hunt roundabout and took a boat over the estuary and done their best for clues. Because Saunders had a dark fear the thing was done by boat and the robbers had rowed up the water in the dusk.

He guessed that Mr. Bragg knew the hiding place of the money and, when he was roped up, the male-

factors had tortured him into telling the secret and then, perhaps, on their homeward way had dumped poor Bragg in the Dart. That was his dreadful theory and he clung to it.

But Betty set no store by any such opinion. In fact, she scoffed at it and made Bob Saunders a good bit annoyed. She felt positive sure that her husband had spied on her, as only a lunatic can spy, and found her hoard and then took the first chance to strub it and be off.

Meantime hue and cry was up and the place and the regions round-about all being hunted very industrious for the vanished man. The day brought nought, however, and they was considering about dragging the estuary if possible when came a fearful discovery. And it was Weston Churchward, the sexton, that made it.

They'd looked high and low, no doubt, but not so high as poor Bragg had ordained to go, for, lifting his eyes in thought and little thinking to see the vanished man, Weston had catched sight of an object aloft in the high top of the great churchyard yew, and he'd gone under and marked, sure enough, a terrible familiar figure in the midst.

In a word, Abednego was there, high up, hanging by his neck; and they fetched ladders and the police went up and brought the dead man down.

'TWAS a nine days' wonder, but little thought upon, him being what he was; and the only interest was to know about the money. Not a penny did they find, however, for he had nought upon him but his clothes and his pipe and his watch, which had stopped at a quarter to six.

He'd took his life that way and cut Mrs. Bragg's clothes-line for the purpose; and he'd hanged there, close hid in the top of the great yew tree for six-and-thirty hours before young Churchward found him.

And though the police didn't go so far as to say the robbers had done for Mr. Bragg, still Saunders held out that the suicide and the theft of the money might be two stories and not one, and he backed his opinion by asking where the money was. Because if the dead man had wanted the money, then he wouldn't be thinking of putting himself away. And if he had took it, then the money must have appeared.

The inquest lasted but twenty minutes and 'twas brought in: "Suicide while of infirm mind." And not a shadow of the cash was seen.

Then, full of strange thoughts, Weston Churchward dug Abednego's grave, and his heart was sad and he felt a pinch of anger, also, because the folk, and hundreds from round-about, had crowded the yard for days to see the fatal scene and the ivy was trampled under many feet.

But he had it to himself the day he started to sink the pit where Abednego had willed to lie, and afterwards, looking back, he always praised God that there weren't nobody alongside him at the time.

Because a foot down under he noted a soft place, and a moment after his pick struck upon metal and he found a big tobacco tin. Not musty and time-stained, neither, but new and shining and there but a short time. He picked it up and took it out to the light and quickly read the words scratched upon the lid in fine capital letters:

"FOR WESTON CHURCHWARD AND MILLY FROM THEIR FRIEND A. BRAGG."

Then Weston Churchward shook in his shoes, but the light shone upon his darkness notwithstanding and he

saw in a moment the terrible curious workings of that dead man's mind.

THE GRAVE-DIGGER didn't dare dally just then, nor yet open the tin, but he put it under his coat and got on with the grave. And, as he dug, he went over the story as it looked to the vanished man, and saw how Abednego had bested his wife, took the money when her back was turned, and housed it where well he knew that young Churchward and none else in the world would find it!

Weston felt a good bit of doubt as to his duty in the matter, but when came nightfall and he told Milly the strange tale and they counted the cash, she didn't feel no uncertainty whatever as to their future behavior.

"Here's nineteen hundred pounds and a bit over," she told him, "and it was my dear Uncle Bed's money and he wanted for me and you to have it. And knowing the law wouldn't let him leave it to us, he tricked the law, and he took his life for our sakes and tricked the law again, because it won't allow nobody to perish by their own hand. And he died for you, like your father died for him.

"And why for shouldn't us have it? Aunt Betty's got enough to live on and she'll own the house also, and that's more than her husband would have left her if he'd been a free man, and more than enough money. So the future's very clear indeed in my opinion. We'll thank God for all His mercies and lie low and say nought; and then, come autumn, we'll wed and go foreign as we always meant, and your mother can come along with us."

"I lay Mrs. Bragg will smell a rat, however," said Weston.

"Let her," said Milly. "She's always yelping about being a martyr, so 'tis well in her day's work to be a real one for a change."

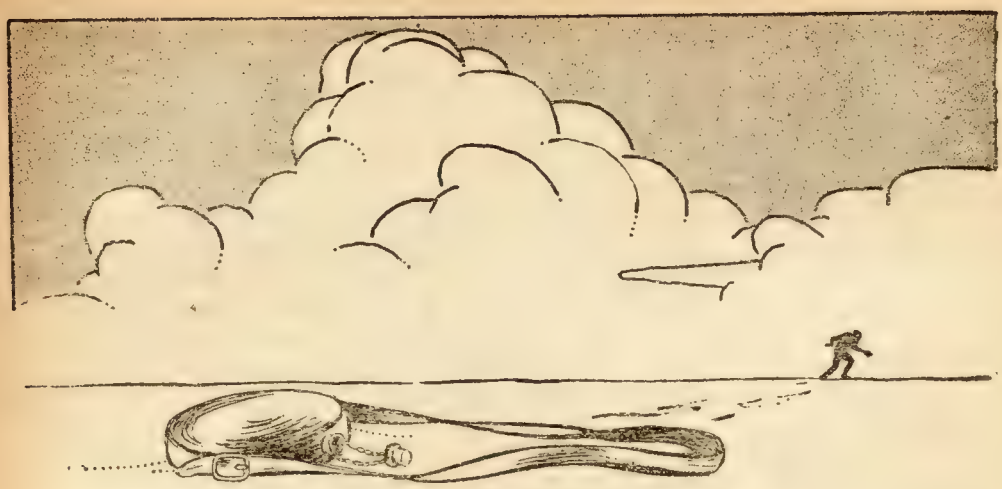
AND SO it fell out just as that poor dead lunatic had ordained. Young Weston Churchward was wed at Thorpe-Michael after harvest and then him and his wife and his mother went to Canada. But Milly and Weston left twenty pounds behind them with a mortuary mason by name of Joe Mallings, a very good friend of theirs; and it was planned that a tidy-sized slate should rise to Abednego in due time.

"The givers wish their names to remain unknown," explained Milly to the mason, "and don't you never tell it, Joe. But 'tis our pleasure to remember my dear uncle, because he was a good man for all his afflictions. And you can lay your life Aunt Betty won't offer to lift nought, so 'tis up to me and Weston."

And Joe Mallings done as he was directed and set up a very serviceable monument much to the surprise of the parish. But he kept their secret, and though a lot was at him to know where the money for a lunatic's grave came from, he never squeaked.

The ivy's long since back over the spot, but the slate, stained with droppings from the great yew, rises above it, and there you can read when Abednego came into the world and when he went out of it, though the curious details was hidden till Mrs. Bragg went home, fifteen years later.

Then Milly wrote 'em from Canada to a woman friend in the parish, so of course everybody knows the tale now.



Salt Water

By LOUIS KAYE

THE NIGHT Shorty Dale deserted from the *Marie Malone,* she was lying becalmed off the Westralian coast. To desert a ship in those waters in the fashion Shorty did is almost equivalent to loading a Colt and placing it against your forehead and pulling the trigger and trusting to luck it won't go off.

The sea between Cossack and Broome is as full of sharks as a coyote is of meanness, and if you get through them safely there's the land itself to face. And the land itself is desolation and death.

You might strike a settlement if you are lucky; if not you'll walk a hundred miles and die. For there's never any water a new chum can find, and that is as far as any man can go without it.

Most don't get anywhere near that distance, and the only thing to tell you they didn't is a heap of bones bleaching in the sunshine.

That was why Captain Blake said to the *Marie Malone's* mate when he had been told of the shadow flitting overside in the darkness: "He's crazy. He'll die, sure."

Then he added: "Well, it's his own funeral, and he never was any good, that boy. I thought maybe the sea would clean him a bit, but it won't. He needs something stronger than salt water."

That was what Captain Blake of the schooner *Marie Malone* said, and he said it very angrily.

But he was a worried man, what with the calm lasting so long and the monsoon season close handy, and he proceeded to forget Shorty Dale as quickly and completely as possible. Which wasn't easy, it might

be added, for with Shorty went something that was not easy to forget—a pearl the captain had acquired from a half-caste north of Broome, where they had put in for fresh water.

Wherefore it was that at frequent intervals he couldn't help muttering to himself: "Needs more than salt water to cure him of his bad habits, the skunk!"

SHORTY DALE got ashore somehow or another. Nobody could explain, for it was a miracle and miracles can't be explained.

A man's life is arranged somehow and by something, and it doesn't profit any to wonder why this happens and this doesn't. Anyway, such was the philosophy of Shorty and, foolish or wise, it enabled him to run risks that nobody but a fatalist could run. So he didn't thank anything when he got ashore without being eaten, but just figured he wasn't timed to die yet.

He landed on the beach and shook the water off himself. Then, as it was a fine, warm night with the star twinkling in the clear sky, he divested himself of his wet clothes, lay down among the tussocks and watched the riding-light of the *Marie Malone* blinking in the darkness that lay out over the sea.

Then he smiled and fingered something round and hard sewed inside the shirt drying at his side—fingered it reverently, for it was worth a lot of money and money was his god and there wasn't much in him except what was bad.

Life had made him that way, and he had done nothing so far toward straightening the warps that were in him. Crooked, that was Shorty Dale; crooked by nature and crooked by choice, and he was only nineteen and had the most innocent blue eyes in the world

That was why he got away with such a lot of things as he had got away with the captain's pearl. Also, it was probably why the Oldtimer didn't see his crookedness till it was nearly too late.

SHORTY met him the next day after having tramped about twenty miles due east by the sun, which meant that he was heading toward the brooding interior where the sand plains spread and where death walks by day and night and a man's tenure of his carcase is about as precarious as a trip across the Pacific in a dinghy.

Shorty arrived at the camp after that twenty miles with a thirst like a dry sponge, and drank a quart pot of black tea before feeling he could talk in comfort.

"Gee, but this is a hard country you got here, stranger!" he said.

"It is that," agreed the Oldtimer. "Hard enough for them as knows it, and you're from the sea by the look of you."

"Sure," said Shorty. "From the sea, and about as happy to get away from it as a mouse from a cat. Which way you heading?"

The Oldtimer, bearded, gaunt and tanned, waved eastward. "In there, sonny. After the reward the Australian Government has offered for the locating of payable oil."

"Sounds good to me," said Shorty. "Suppose you ain't carrying any passengers?"

"Not passengers, sonny. But if you like to work for your grub, you can join up. Sort of like a white face about me."

THEY broke camp early the next morning. They were only three in all—Shorty, the Oldtimer and an aboriginal boy about sixteen or seventeen.

Four camels were hitched to the

covered buckboard in which they traveled. They had no horses, for the country where they were heading was never meant for horses.

Sand it was, and sand still. Little patches of spinifex here; mulga and stunted gums like a blur on the horizon; gullies; ridges or ironstone; clay-pans, and maybe a bit of a swamp sometimes in the low-lying oases.

But sand mostly, and always sand beyond whatever verdure they saw—sand beneath it, around it, and the blue and cloudless sky above, arching in splendor from gray desert ahead to gray desert behind.

And the camels, their sullen heads held high, plowing on, and the buckboard with its big, white cover creaking behind.

There was no seat to the buckboard, and Shorty lay on the floor, gazing out of the loop in front at the plodding camels. The old man sat on a box, hacking at a plug of tobacco. The black boy, sitting at one side of the front of the vehicle, was driving. He was naked, and his skin gleamed with sweat.

The shadows of the camels were thrown almost directly under them as the sun swung up to noon. Ahead was a dark blur of timber, and the Oldtimer, smoking stolidly, was gazing at it.

"Water there," he said. "Good water," he added. "We'll fill our tank."

There was a small tank in the buckboard near the rear part of the floor. It was covered with a wooden lid, and sacks were under it to prevent its jarring. The jolting of the vehicle caused the water to splash about inside it, but there wasn't much to splash now.

On the floor near the tank was a box with a lid and padlock. But the padlock was yawning open, and an extra jolt of the buckboard jerked it out of the U-piece onto the floor.

Shorty got up, crouching under the low canvas cover, and went to it and endeavored to replace it. In doing this, either by intent or carelessness, he raised the lid a little, and then let it slam shut.

The old man was looking at him. "Gold in there, sonny," he said. "Looks kind of satisfying, don't it?"

"But I thought you was after oil?" said Shorty.

"Don't want to have all your eggs in the one basket," said the Oldtimer. "Oil is a ticklish thing to go after in these parts. Ain't been a payable find made yet, so they had to offer a reward to make it worth looking for. But there's enough metal there to make this trip pay if I don't find anything else."

Remembering the glimpse of it he had had, Shorty felt that there was.

"I don't know nothing about gold, though," he said. "About how much do you reckon that lot would fetch?"

"Maybe a thousand," said the Oldtimer.

"A thousand what?" asked Shorty.

"Pounds."

"How much is that in dollars?"

The Oldtimer scratched his ear. "Oh, I dunno exactly. Between four and five thousand, I figure it."

And then Shorty did a bit of figuring himself—mentally. Sewed inside his shirt was a pearl worth maybe a thousand dollars; here in a box right beside him was gold worth four times that or more. Total: about five thousand dollars.

He'd never handled that much money at one time in all his life, and he felt that it would be good to handle. But mere feeling that it would be good to handle didn't get him far toward the actual thing. He'd have to mull it over and plan out a way.

WHILE Shorty was engaged upon this, the Oldtimer kept annoying him unwittingly by remarking at length on the nature of the country and the things that had happened in it.

"See that clump of spinifex over there? That's where Ned Wright and Tommy Howard was found dead. We buried 'em and put a little heap of stones at the head of their graves. But they ain't there so you can see 'em now. The sand's always shifting, and it's covered the stones up!"

Then, a little later: "See that bit of a ridge down there to the south? Well, just back of that a bit there's a salt lake. Little feller called Mike Gregan landed alongside it one day after traveling nigh on a hundred miles without water.

"Couldn't get it out of his head that it wasn't salt, and started drinking. Then he found it was salt and got his camel and lit out as if all the devils in hell were after him, for he knew if he kept around he'd never be able to stop drinking that water and that if he kept on drinking he'd go mad and die a terrible death.

"But he just couldn't ride away from it. Something kept pulling him back, and we found him on the edge of it when we rode up next morning."

"Dead?" asked Shorty, coming out of the whirl of his mental plotting.

"Mad," said the old man. "We just saved him with cold tea. I guess he'd never have got away from it if we hadn't happened along. Salt water's like that. Sort of draws you back after you been drinking it."

"Huh!" Shorty grunted. "It won't draw me back any to speak of. I'm through with the sea."

"Maybe," said the Oldtimer. "But I wasn't thinking of it that way. I mean if you drank salt water like Mike Gregan done."

"Guess I'm wise to that," said Shorty. "Heard tell of fellars adrift in open boats at sea and taken to drinking salt water and going mad. Most folks know that, I guess."

The Oldtimer turned his head slowly and looked at him.

"That's so, sonny," he said. "But there's one thing you don't know that I can tell you."

"Yeh?" said Shorty.

"You can't get away with the gold in that box like you're aiming to," said the Oldtimer.

THEY headed east—always east. The sun rose red and pitiless ahead of them mornings, and nights it sank red and pitiless behind them. Hot winds blew down from the north across the brooding wastes and whirled the sand and dust away in little spirals. Spinifex, mulga, and ironstone ridges passed by in weary succession. The camels jogged along, heads up and sullen-faced; the covered buckboard churned its four wheels through the sand.

Night, and they were camped by a swamp where the reeds rustled slightly in the gentle breeze and the paper-trees stood like sentinels with their white trunks showing against the dark foliage and the frog-filled water of the swamp.

"You sure done me an injustice," Shorty was saying, "when you figured I was aiming to lift that gold."

The Oldtimer turned and looked at him. "All right, sonny," he said. "Say nothing more about it. I don't want you to feel sore."

The camels were feeding by the swamp where the frogs trilled and croaked. The black boy was tending a small fire on which he was baking a 'damper', which is the bread of the Australian wild.

A small but solid limb was at Shorty's side, and he had his hand upon it. The old man was looking away again. The broken limb was

raised in the darkness. Thrice — quickly— it fell.

"Here, Jacko!" snapped Shorty, swinging round on the black boy with the Oldtimer's rifle in his hands. "Set them camels harnessed to the buckboard again, quick! Savvy? Then you get aboard and head for the nearest settlement."

The black obeyed the command, for there was little else he could do seeing it was enforced by the rifle. As soon as he had the camels hitched to the buckboard and had taken his seat to drive, Shortly climbed into the vehicle from the rear, his rifle covering the dark back before him.

"Now you try anything on me, you black devil," he snarled, "and I'll plug you sure!"

The trembling boy said nothing, and the camels lurched through the night, the buckboard jolting in their rear, and Shorty lying on its floor, his eyes seldom leaving the hunched figure in silhouette against the loop of sky revealed by the opening at the front.

THEY traveled all night. There was no place to water the camels in the morning, so they kept traveling then. So far as Shorty could see, there was nothing to prevent them from going right ahead without stopping at all save for the fatigue of the camels.

As for water, they didn't need it. This he learned from the boy. They would drink if there was water to drink, but they could continue two or three days without it and feel no discomfort. And as for the buckboard's passengers, they need seek no water yet, either, for there was the tank right close to Shorty, and it was full.

They had filled it early in the evening at the swamp. Also, they had plenty of stores. Shorty looked them over, and found several cans of meat and tomatoes and beans, and packets of tea, a bag of rice, sugar, flour and salt.

"Good for weeks," he told himself. "And they won't be needed that long. All I got to do when we get near a settlement is get rid of the nigger and bury the gold till I can come back. Easy to explain about the old man. Any old lame yarn'll do. They mightn't believe it, but they won't be able to prove it's wrong."

Of course, there were risks. But Shorty's philosophy enabled him fairly satisfactorily to disregard these.

And, anyway, there had always been risks in his life. Almost the first thing he could remember was a tong war in Frisco's Chinatown where a badly aimed bullet had plowed through his shoulder and broken his collar-bone.

He was born to hazard, and had about as much fear of dying as a duck has of getting wet. Being jailed, though, wasn't the same thing, and he did have a sort of dread of that. But he wasn't going to let any mutts get hold of him!

DUSK came again, and they camped now to rest the camels. They were on a flat plain, sand all around and hardly a tree in sight, and not a drop of water within miles.

"No plurry waterhole long time him come," the black boy answered when Shorty questioned him. "Sand him everywhere. White fellar town him bin long time come too."

"Huh!" grunted Shorty. "Well, I guess we'll locate here to-night and push on in the morning."

They ate their supper in the starlight at the rear of the buckboard, Shorty always keeping his rifle close handy. Then they sat in silence while the camels stood like graven images, sullen heads held high.

Shorty was yawning and wondering how he could get a bit of sleep. Mulling this over, he could only come

to one decision—the black boy would have to spend the night tied up.

There were ropes in the buckboard, and Shorty got up from his seat on the sand and moved to the buckboard, watching the black out of the corner of his eye meanwhile.

But it needed more than a glance out of the corner of an eye to watch that boy, as Shorty learned right there. A shadow flitted away through the darkness as silently as a real shadow could move, and Shorty was short a guide.

Twice he fired into the darkness, blindly, hoping the shooting would frighten the boy and fetch him back. But there was no return of him, and Shorty came back to the buckboard, cursing freely.

He knew where the boy was headed, back to the swamp where the old man had been left. Maybe the old fellow wasn't dead. If so the boy would probably scout round till he picked up some prospectors and lead them to the waterhole. Then they'd hit the trail of the buckboard and catch him up.

This notion didn't appeal to Shorty enough to stop his cussing, and he felt the future wasn't too full of cheer. Yet there was a chance that he could make through to some settlement alone, spin some yarn, and make his getaway.

There was even a small chance that he might be able to do this and still retain the gold. It would be hard to account for, but it was worth the risk.

Anyway, he wouldn't be able to bury the gold anywhere without it's being found now, for that black boy, following the trail of the buckboard, would locate the spot where he had stopped and hidden it.

"Have to carry it along," he reflected. "Guess it's the only way, and I gotta keep moving."

But the camels were lying down now, and he reckoned it would pay him in the long run to let them rest a while. The night was fine and warm, so he spread his blankets on the sand at the rear of the buckboard and lay down. He wanted to sleep, was dog-tired in fact, but he feared to close his eyes lest he sleep till daybreak. He must be moving on before then.

Which way? Northwest the black boy had been driving, so he wouldn't be far out, he figured, if he kept to the same course. He knew the stars enough to do this. He could see the Southern Cross blinking above the skyline way down yonder.

But he couldn't keep his eyes opened, though he had no recollection of closing them. He was conscious, however, of waking suddenly and finding that it was near dawn. He could see a vague pallor in the east, and feel the slight chill of this last hour of darkness.

Swearing a little at having slept so long, he got the camels harnessed to the buckboard and headed them northwest at a fair pace. The darkness swept away, and the day came, and the sun rose red and pitiless over the desert.

AT THE same moment, the black boy was traveling southeast at a speedy walk. Now and again he broke into a loping run, but mostly he walked.

At no time did he walk slowly. Between four and five miles an hour must have been his pace, and this was smart walking over the sand.

It would have tired a white man used to the saddle, but the black boy's walking muscles were well-developed and supple, and he was far from weary yet. Also, he traveled as the crow flies, and there was no time wasted.

He had water. Two small canvas bags of it were slung from a rope looped round his neck. After filling

these bags from the tank, he had taken them, along with the rope, from the buckboard before they had eaten that night and planted them in the sand.

There was also something else he carried, a little sack, empty, held in his right hand. But he carried nothing beyond these, and he was as naked as Adam before he discovered that a fig tree has leaves.

The sun lifted high, and he was still walking and now and again running a little.

The sun was above him, the noontide heat scorching the desert under him, and he was still heading like a homing pigeon for the swamp and the man who lay there either dead or alive.

The sun was sinking behind him, and still there was no rest for his muscles. And they were wearying now, for the pace was killing.

He didn't run any more, but if he only walked he walked without stopping and he was still eating up the miles. Yet his limbs were dragging a little, and once or twice there were marks in the sand where his toes scraped, and the alertness had gone out of his brown eyes and they were dull with fatigue.

The sun was down now, the stars appearing. A bit of a breeze, hot as a blast from a furnace, had blown through the day. Now it died, and after a little while a wind came up from the south. It was not very cool, but it was not hot and it refreshed him a little.

Also, the ample supply of water he still carried helped to keep him going.

In the darkness he could just see the skyline; there was enough light from the stars for that. He saw it gradually blurring, as if with timber, and though his eyes could not be certain it was timber his sense of location and direction was so keen that he knew it was.

An hour, or maybe a little more, and he would be at the swamp. He could afford to exert himself over this last stage, for he wanted to find out whether his white fellar boss was still living. He had a black skin, but a grateful heart, and the bearded prospector was the kindest thing he had known.

So he broke into a run. It was not an easy run. It was labored, and he was breathing hard. But it covered the ground, and the timber grew darker on the skyline and gradually drew nearer.

Now it was so near he could make out the shape of the trees sufficiently to judge his shortest cut to the swamp.

Half an hour later he was there, panting, exhausted. His aching limbs sagged under him, and he flopped down beside a man who was still living who was indeed sitting up with his back to the swamp. His hand came out and stroked the black, coarse hair of the little narrow head beside him.

"Well done, Jacko!" he said. "I'm darn glad to see you get through."

The boy held up his hand. An empty sack was in it. "Look, Boss," he said. "Him bad fellar come back. Him gotta come back alonga swamp."

SHORTY had traveled since daybreak at a steady pace. It was now half-way toward noon, and he had his eye open for a good place to camp in the midday heat. But no timber showed over the horizon, and he reckoned it wouldn't be any good spelling out here on the sand with no shade or water for the camels. Might as well keep going. The camels had had a bit of rest that night, and if he let them travel easily they could stand the journey maybe till dusk. When dusk came, it wouldn't much matter about shade, and the next day he'd find water for them for sure. Any-

way, if he couldn't, he'd give them their heads and let them locate it themselves.

A wind started to come down from the north. It was a terrible wind, hot as the infernal fires and ceaseless as eternity. You could hear the sand being lifted by it and see it speeding away in little spirals. And it was blowing into the buckboard, making a white film over everything.

"Hot as a blooming oven!" Shorty cursed. "Good job I got plenty of water."

He could hear the water splashing about in the tank as the buckboard jolted. It was a comforting sort of sound. Then, too, it was consoling to know that he didn't have to get out and walk. All he had to do was sit in the buckboard and get dragged along.

He thought the Almighty had done a kindly thing by putting camels in the world and was glad Noah hadn't overlooked them when he shipped in the Ark.

Then he set to wondering if the black boy had made the journey back to the swamp. May be he would never get there. This desert was sure fierce to anybody afoot.

TOWARD noon he did sight a bit of timber—a few stunted paper trees surrounding a depression wherein at first he thought there might be water. But when he drew near he found that it was nothing but dry mud, with a skirting of gleaming white salt round its edges. A little salt lake dried up by the sun.

It made Shorty think of the yarns the Oldtimer had told—there was that one about Mike somebody who started drinking salt water and couldn't stop and went mad.

It was maybe this thought that roused up his thirst. He could hear the water splashing about in the dark, and the sound was comforting.

In a moment or two he got up and lifted the lid off. Then he got a pannikin and dipped it in the water.

A jolt of the buckboard, caused by a wheel passing over a big flat stone, threw him off his balance and he fell against the side of the canvas cover, almost punching a hole through with his elbow and spilling the water.

Swearing at his clumsiness, he dipped the pannikin into the tank again and raised it to his lips.

The expression on his face changed from one of satisfaction to one of surprise, and then to one of horror. He coughed and spluttered. He lowered the pannikin and looked in it. Then he looked in the tank. Then he lifted the pannikin to his lips again for another taste. Again he spat the water out.

Then he swung round and examined the stores. He ticked them off mentally, and there was one sack missing and in that sack there had been—salt!

"Gawd," he swore, "that doggone nigger's put it in the tank!"

TWO days later a buckboard, drawn by four water-seeking camels, drew up alongside a swamp. The black boy and the bearded Oldtimer, looking in under the cover at the rear, saw a figure lying by a tank whose lid was on the floor beside it. A pannikin rolled on the floor, and the prone figure babbled deliriously.

"I wonder," said the Oldtimer, "how much of it he's drunk!"

THE *Molly Malone* had been lying in Port Adelaide, South Australia, for a month, waiting cargo. Her captain was in a bad humor as he sat in the after-house looking through some papers. Nothing was going right. But presently something came about that put him in a better frame of mind.

It was none other than Shorty Dale who stepped into the afterhouse and laid on the bench before the captain a roll of notes.

"Two hundred pounds was all I could get for it, Cap'n," he said. "But I had to sell it to get here, and I had to use some of the money. But I guess if you was to sign me on again I could easily make up the difference out of my wages."

Captain Blake looked Shorty in the eye, and Shorty's blue eyes were as innocent-looking as ever; but they had never told the truth about his heart till now.

"Shorty," said Captain Blake, his good humor restored by the sight of the pile of banknotes before him, "it would seem you're gone and turned square, and that's always a beautiful thing to contemplate."

"And you aim to sign me on again, Cap'n?" asked Shorty.

"So far as I know," said Captain Blake, "you was never signed off."

Shorty grinned a little.

He grinned some more that night when he overheard Captain Blake say to his mate:

"I was right about that Shorty. It took the desert to get the kink out of him. Salt water wasn't any good!"

Diced Fate

During the siege of Namur in 1695 there was a great lack of provisions in the besieging camp. Some of the soldiers whose belts had been drawn to the last hole about their empty bellies went foraging, though the penalty was death.

Most of them were killed by the country people, but two escaped, only to receive sentence of death on their return to the camp. They were both brave soldiers and the Commander-in-chief offered life to one of them, which one to be determined by a throw of dice.

At the foot of the gallows was a drum on end and the two men threw. But both threw two sixes. The men were commanded to throw again. This time they both had two fives.

The spectators now raised a shout that the culprits should be pardoned, and the puzzled officers put off the execution while they consulted the court martial then sitting. The verdict was that the two men should throw again.

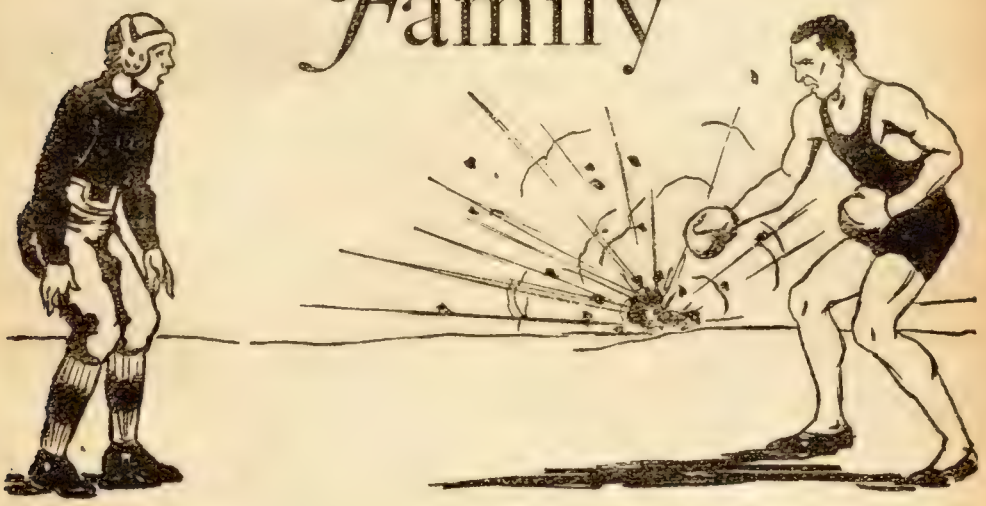
The first with trembling hand shook the dice, and two fours rolled out on the drum-head. The other hesitated, then drew another two fours.

There was a great shout: "This is the finger of God!"

The officers again referred to the court martial, the members of which, astounded at this interposition of Divine Providence, decided to let the Commander-in-Chief settle the question.

The culprits were taken before him and stated the motives which had led them into error, and the manner of their salvation. The general heard the case carefully and, remarking that it was impossible in such an uncommon case not to obey the voice of Divine Providence, pronounced pardon.

The Friend of the Family



By SAMUEL MORSE

The roar of the subway, the wink of an eye—and you are plunged into the midst of the queer hodge-podge of kid gloves and padded mitts that go to make up little old New York. You'll sit in at a solemn family council on Fifth Avenue and travel with the friend of the family around the Bronx in search of an English-speaking policeman to direct your unwary feet to the doorstep of the roguish Irish beauty.. Samuel Morse knows his hilarious New York, and the more serious glimpses behind it—and it will be your own fault if you don't absorb it.

CHAPTER I.

TEMPERAMENT AND CANDACE

SO MANY fellows have been telling things lately that it looks as if the open season for inside information has arrived. Anyway, it seems to me the moment is opportune for the publication of an uncensored account of that Godalming - Hathaway - O'Brien affair. Perhaps it might be more seemly were another pen than mine to indite the facts. But Julian Godalming and Candace, having come off with flying colors, look upon me, the scapegoat, philosophically.

For my part, only extreme provocation has impelled me to speak. Bill Carew wrote me recently for information as to a rumor that I had been indicted for attempted

homicide on the person of Johnny Devoe.

Mind you, Bill at the time of writing was tiger-shooting in India. When false reports about a fellow are circulated internationally, it is high time for him to take the bull by the forelock, as the phrase goes.

Julian half-intimated that Bill had been kidding, but he was not unwilling to have the facts published.

Now that I am at liberty to submit the documents in evidence, I shall confine my utterance to authenticated statements. As to the truth or falsity of the insinuation that I blundered egregiously, the public shall be the judge.

I will prove incontestably, however, that I did not effect a burglarious entry into the Devoe home, that my conduct toward Nora O'Brien there and elsewhere was justifiable, and that, far from attempting to betray my old pal Julian, I was really inspired by unselfish motives, as a friend of the family.

In fact, were it not for his contentious attitude, the scandal probably—but I shall begin at the beginning.

JULIAN Godalming always had a queer streak of obstinacy. Once he had made up his mind, he was plain pig-headed. When he had those contrary moods, he presumably thought he was only standing up for his right. Dapper little fellows like him are inclined to carry a chip on the shoulder.

Don't get the impression, though, that he was cocky or sullen. He was normally rather affable and lighthearted, and he was not balky until some one crossed him.

They may call him Julian nowadays, but his old pals knew him as Mule. Even when we were at prep school, where he got his nickname, he was as temperamental as a *prima donna*.

He would beggar himself to lend me pocket money and, if he got a box of sweetmeats from home, he would insist on my taking two-thirds; but if one of my shoes in the closet got mixed with his or I rolled over onto his half of the bed in my sleep he would abuse me scandalously.

Mule scorned rows with pocket editions like himself. He always picked on me. Many an impromptu bout was fought in our room. Once we locked horns over the word Kamchatka, he insisting it was a republic, while I was equally sure it was a fur-bearing animal.

He leaped on me like a wild man, with both fists flying, and when he knocked one of my teeth loose I became irritated.

Even in those days I was much too big to hit him, so I hung him up on the chandelier to cool off. It made me laugh to see him dangling there and sputtering:

"You're a rotten coward, Jumbo—a rotten coward you are!"

I was never quick at repartee. While I was thinking up something, the chandelier broke. Both of us were docked our holidays the rest of the month for that, although Mule stood up to the head-master and tried to take all of the blame.

In college we were like Damon and Pythias, as one of the fellows put it who knew his Shakespeare. I squeezed through and came out with a thorough, practical knowledge of rowing and football. Julian was a good scholar; otherwise, I should have flunked.

He kept his temper better, as he grew older, and before we had passed the age of fisticuffs I found out how to avoid quarrels, which I have al-

ways detested. Instead of lashing out at me when an altercation had reached a deadlock, he would stick out his chin, look me over with a calm, impersonal stare, as if I were a trick elephant, and whistle softly through his teeth.

"Now, look here, Lawrence Wheeler," he would begin in a low threatening monotone.

That would be my cue to give in, and I would always respond, "Oh, well, have it your own way, Mule, and let's forget it," or something of that sort.

No one ever won an argument with Julian, he was such an obstinate pup. When he and Candace Hathaway became engaged, I thought he had met his match.

Not that Candace was especially headstrong. But she was a blithe, self-reliant girl, with a clever little way of managing people. Efficiency was Candace's middle name.

Even old Oliver Hathaway, who could make boards of directors roll over and bark, was like a lamb in the hands of his daughter. As Carew used to say, when she looked at you from under her long lashes, her eyes laughed, and when she spoke, it made you think of temple bells at twilight—something like Trinity chimes, I suppose. The old birds at the club declared she had inherited the beauty of her mother, who had died when Candace was a kid.

Like half of the other fellows in town, including myself, Julian worshipped her. She handled him without an effort for six months, before he kicked over the traces. This was in April, 1917.

Julian was for enlisting, while Candace insisted he should go to Plattsburg. The disagreement wound up in a merry row at the Hathaway home. Julian ran true to form: stuck out his chin, whistled a bit, and finally emerged into Fifth Avenue, with the engagement ring in his pocket.

Candace fled to her room and wept, as I happen to know. She vowed she would never see him again. At the time, of course, it did not occur to her that some of the fellows bound for France were going West.

If I had ever imagined I was in the running, Candace's next move dispelled the illusion. She had always called me her big brother and ordered me about as if I were a pet Saint Bernard.

After the spat with Julian, she turned to me for consolation. There was just one thought in her mind: I was his best friend. She clung to me because I was closest to the one who was closest to her. Even I could see that, and I have never been quick on the trigger mentally.

A better man than I might have heard her tearful confidences forever and still held his distance, but I was tempted sorely. One night when I was taking her home from a theatre I almost proposed to her. The following day I enlisted.

Some of the fellows thought I was a twenty-four karat patriot, like Julian. To tell the truth, I had a sneaking hope just then that I might bump into a bullet where it would do the most good. It was not until we reached France that that feeling wore off.

JULIAN and I got into the same unit with some other New York volunteers. Before we left camp, Candace came down to see him. Her father and my father, who were partners in the firm of Wheeler, Hathaway and Harkness, were with her. One can only guess what happened when she saw Julian alone.

I had my own troubles bidding good-by to the governor.

When Candace came out of the hostess house with Julian, she had been crying—her blue eyes were still glistening—but she smiled bravely enough, and I noticed that she again wore his ring. In fact, she kissed him good-by before us all.

In France we both got commissions, and later there came a round robin from fellows at the club congratulating us. Julian scarcely read it, for the same mail brought a letter from Candace.

Nothing much happened to me over there. Julian distinguished himself. It was in the thick of the St. Mihiel push. On a reconnaissance, he ran across a private who had been drilled through the leg.

He was bringing the fellow in when a shell struck near enough to knock them both flat. Another chap went out and hauled them out of the zone of fire.

Julian got a decoration for that, while the other chap, who had rescued him, got the dickens from a superior officer and narrowly escaped a court-martial.

This incident wound up Julian's active service. He was trundled off to a hospital with a well-developed case of shell shock, and eventually landed at Beaune, where he spent some weeks convalescing. I believe he managed to squeeze in a long leave on the Riviera, too.

When I returned, after the Armistice, he was as sound as a silver dollar, barring an occasional reminder of St. Mihiel. He told me that fatigue or excitement left him a bit twitchy, but I could see that the army life had done him a world of good physically.

He was heavier and he carried himself in a way that made you overlook the fact he was only five feet six. He had grown one of those close-cropped wire mustaches, too.

OLD ELLERY Godalming had raised an awful howl over his son's enlistment, but after he got the news from the front he went about like a pouter pigeon, telling his club cronies that Julian was a chip off the old block. Godalming, senior, was a leather merchant, and being notoriously rich it was easy for him now to settle a smashing allowance on his only son and heir apparent.

My own governor had been called to his fathers, leaving a will that requested Oliver Hathaway to take me into the firm. So the name became Wheeler, Hathaway, Harkness and Wheeler, I being the ultimate Wheeler. I did manage to get admitted to the bar, but the effort must have left me permanently exhausted, and the result was dismal.

Hathaway's devotion to the governor's memory was all that stood between me and expulsion from the firm. He fumed and fretted incessantly over my bungling attempts to practice corporation law.

The firm had a number of old clients who brought in routine or semi-legal affairs for settlement. Besides acting as a conveyancer, I dispensed plain common sense to these people—good advice with a smattering of legal information—and thus kept them out of litigation, which was my principal function.

In fact, I soon became a sort of professional Friend of the Family.

It was in this rôle that I officiated after Julian Godalming was arrested. If it had not been for Candace, though, I should have let him cool his heels in the Bridewell—confound his obstinacy!

CHAPTER II.

SUBWAY CONTACTS

THE Godalming-Hathaway wedding had been set for June, and the newspapers had announced the forthcoming nuptials in rather mushy articles, as I thought, about the beautiful heiress and the war hero. It was all true enough, but the reporters laid it on too thick.

Old Godalming, who was a pompous little rooster, strutted about the club for several days, parting his whiskers and lamenting the silly sentimentality of the press. He was afraid some of the fellows might have missed the stories.

When I picked up my paper at breakfast a few weeks later—it was the first of June, I think—there was a heading on the first page that made me gasp. I have saved a clipping of it:

JULIAN GOLALMING,
WAR HERO, ARRESTED,
ACCUSED OF FLIRTING

Pretty Little Nora O'Brien Has Son of Leather Magnate Seized in Crowded Subway

---

Fiancé of Society Heiress

Wedding of Accused Man and Miss Candace Hathaway Has Been Set for Second Week in June

The article traced the Godalming family clear back to the Mayflower period, doubled back over the ancestral tracks of the Hathaways, expatiated upon Candace's charms and of course described Nora O'Brien.

The impression I got was that Nora's "roguish Irish beauty" had captivated the young clubman, but she was really not that sort of girl, having come of an old and proud County Clare family whose financial straits, due to the war, had caused her to emigrate to America and enter domestic service.

Just where the reporter got this information I can't imagine, for Julian had had the case postponed in Night Court through the intercession of an ambulance-chaser, and Nora had promptly vanished. One Isidore Gluckstein, of Stanton Street, had bailed the hero out.

I spent half an hour at the telephone trying to catch Julian. He had not been home, according to his man, nor had he sent word of his whereabouts. When I talked with Candace over the wire, she was quite upset.

"Nobody knows where he is," she exclaimed. "You must find him, Larry. He may do something rash."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry over him," said I, to console her.

"You brute," she answered, and hung up the phone.

My think-tank works rather slowly, so I went down to my office in Wall Street where I could meditate at length. There, as I entered, was Julian, standing at the window with his back to me.

"Good morning, Mule," I sang out, hoping to approach the pending matter in a jovial manner. "Fine day, what?"

He turned slowly and asked in that exasperating, calm way of his:

"Have you seen the morning papers?"

"Only one of them," I assured him. "Only one."

"Better look 'em over," he said, indicating the pile on my desk.

"If you're referring to that O'Brien affair," I explained, "the account in my paper was quite complete."

"Oh, it was, was it?" He stuck out his chin and began whistling.

"Of course, I don't know all the details," I said apologetically.

"You don't know any of them, you poor nut!"

"Oh, well, have it your own way. Let's forget it."

It was an unfortunate remark on my part. He instantly flared up:

"Forget it? And you call yourself a lawyer! Ye gods!"

JULIAN paced back and forth before my desk, muttering maledictions on my head, although I had expressly told him on sundry occasions that I was not an accomplished lawyer.

"Suppose you tell me your version of the incident," I suggested, unruffled.

"Of course, you will not be able to grasp it," he sighed, "but I have to talk to somebody, or I shall go crazy. Please try to comprehend me, Jumbo." He settled down in his chair. "When I got on the subway train at Wall Street, I had forgotten to buy a paper to read."

"Natural oversight," I observed. "I've done the same thing myself."

The thought upset him, nevertheless; he bit his lip a moment before continuing:

"I sat in a brown study, thinking of Candace and plans for our wedding trip. I was anxious to get away for a rest. The market had gone against me, and I had been putting in some strenuous days at my broker's.

"Suddenly I heard someone say in an undertone, 'Stop it, you bum!' but naturally I paid no attention to the exclamation at the time. Next thing I knew, a woman who had been sitting across the car from me jumped up and shouted——"

"One moment," I interrupted. "How could she have jumped up in a crowded subway car?"

"Don't butt in," he cried. "The car was not crowded. The woman suddenly arose and shouted, 'Arrest that man! He's trying to flirt with me!' She pointed straight at me. I was utterly amazed.

"Before I could collect my thoughts, half a dozen fellows had grabbed me, and the woman was denouncing me so furiously that I couldn't get a word in edge-wise. Unfortunately, we pulled in at Fourteenth Street before the excitement subsided. On the platform they handed me over to a policeman. He refused to let me talk with the woman."

"But why didn't you deny her charge?" I asked shrewdly.

"Jumbo, if you had the brains of a cootie, you'd know that prisoners invariably deny their guilt. When I protested that I was innocent, the policeman replied, 'Aw, that's what they all say.'"

"Oh, well, it might have been worse. Flirting is not a felony," I informed him.

HATHAWAY had a trick of inserting a dramatic pause before putting the vital question to a witness. It was a most effective artifice, and I employed it on Julian.

"Tell me, as between lawyer and client," I declaimed suddenly, "what were you doing to annoy the woman?"

"You consummate ass," he shouted, "I did nothing. That's what I have been trying to drive into your thick skull."

"You must have been doing something."

Whereupon Julian began to rave. I thought I should have to hang him up on the coat rack. The patent sincerity of his tirade, rather than the mass of irrelevant reflec-

tions upon my own acumen, impressed me; before he had exhausted his vocabulary the case had taken on an entirely new aspect in my mind.

"My dear chap," I said, "you should have told me before that you were innocent."

"I did, I did, I did," he roared.

"Pardon me," I interposed firmly. "You told me only what you had told the policeman. That was what they all say. The fact that you really are innocent is quite another matter. It is extremely important. Why, we may be able even to procure an acquittal."

Julian burst into long, raucous laughter. I think he was becoming a bit hysterical. I let his mirthless merriment subside before suggesting:

"Suppose we go up to Hathaway's. Candace has been trying to find you. She was very much interested in the reports of your arrest."

In the taxi, Julian sat brooding and whistling all the way uptown. When we reached the Plaza he straightened up with fire in his eye, as if in anticipation of a disagreeable scene farther up the avenue. I could almost read his thoughts.

"What shall you tell Candace?" I asked.

"The truth."

"I dare say she will believe you," I observed hopefully. "But if any question should arise, I do hope you will keep your temper."

"Candace won't raise any question," he snapped, "and if her friends and relatives don't believe me, they can go hang—and I'll give them something to think about, if they get too nosey."

My misgivings over this threat were utterly inadequate in view of what subsequently happened.

CHAPTER III.

AUNTS AND HALLUCINATIONS

THE Hathaway house was plunged in gloom. Cullop, the butler, pulled a long, sanctimonious face at the door, as if we were lost sheep or prohibition agents. On the way upstairs I glimpsed out of the corner of my eye a couple of maids peering from behind curtains at the notorious visitor.

In the Louis Something-or-other drawing room we came upon a gathering of the clans—Ellery Godalming, Hathaway, three elderly aunts and also several fussy spinsters who were evidently volunteer sympathizers. We found them conversing in sepulchral tones. They did not see us at first.

Old Godalming stood at the fireplace, fretfully parting his whiskers; the aunts, notwithstanding their patrician air, looked like a hung jury, and the spinsters humbly scattered seeds of kindness in exchange for any morsels of gossip that might be picked up.

Hathaway was the only one that seemed human. He was a stately white-haired veteran, with a suave manner. Even Julian stood in some awe of his prospective father-in-law.

When we finally advanced into the room they all bowed, as if our entrance had been rehearsed that way, and muttered unintelligible greetings. It gave me a vague feeling that I should pussy-foot around offering condolences.

We might have withstood this oppressive atmosphere but for an unexpected shock. The one person who should have stood by Julian in a pinch was not there. He looked about with a surprised frown.

"Where is Candace?" he asked.

"Candace left home an hour ago,"

Hathaway answered. "I presume she had an engagement."

Julian pondered a moment.

"Ah, I understand," he remarked.

What he understood was beyond my comprehension, but it was evidently something that riled him.

"We have been awaiting you for some time," Hathaway rumbled. "I trust it is not necessary for me to recite the alleged facts that have caused us very deep concern."

"Yes," old Ellery barked, "where the devil have you been?"

There was a strained moment. You could have knocked the spinster's eyes off with a stick.

"I have been consulting a lawyer," Julian stated coldly.

"Then why in Heligoland didn't you bring him with you?" Ellery asked.

WITH an elaborate gesture, Julian silently presented me. It was a mean trick, wishing the whole job off on me in that way, but I coughed and looked as legal as possible. Hathaway measured me with a disapproving eye.

"Humph! And may I inquire as to the result of these deliberations?"

"Er—er—yes, sir," said I.

"Proceed, if you please."

Now I was never able to talk to the chief without embarrassment. He always made me feel as if I were trumping his ace. On this occasion, for Julian's sake, I determined to meet the issue boldly.

"The case, Mr. Hathaway, is still in course of preparation."

Ellery Godalming clawed the air with both hands.

"Demmit, sir," he wailed, "we must do something. Do you realize that my reputation is being bandied about? This affair is making me a laughing stock."

Julian began to whistle.

"Permit me to assure you that you are unduly sensitive on that score," Hathaway spoke with a disdainful air. "We shall assume that your son is innocent of the charge. I trust that we are correct in that assumption?"

Julian stubbornly ignored the challenge, so I stepped into the breach.

"As a result of my deliberations with my client, I have proved that he is entirely innocent," I declared.

"Indeed? Then the case has been tried?" rejoined Hathaway.

"Not yet. But I have his word for it. He says he did not annoy the woman in any way."

"That's what they all say," old Ellery bleated.

Nevertheless, there was a patter of timid hand-clapping among the women, and I could see that I was making progress. I might have scored a tremendous moral victory, if Hathaway had not butted in.

"Perhaps you"—he turned to Julian—"will be good enough to give us an intelligible account of what actually happened."

Julian doggedly repeated the tale he had told me. I must admit that it sounded unconvincing. As he proceeded, the women's eyebrows went higher and higher, and Hathaway's face wrinkled up in puzzled apprehension.

"Do you mean to say that there was absolutely no provocation for the woman's action?" he asked.

"None."

"You did not smile at her? Or address any remark to her?"

"Certainly not."

Godalming, senior, chimed in:

"Let us know the worst."

Julian shot a patricidal glance at the peppery old gentleman. Hathaway was deeply perplexed. After pondering a moment, he asked gravely:

"Do you think the woman was demented?"

"I don't know," Julian retorted.

Hathaway had handled recalcitrant witnesses before Mule was born. He had a habit of pointing a warning finger, which rose and fell slowly as if he were counting his victim out. He now trained it on Julian.

"Do you know anything whatsoever that may shed light upon this rema-a-arkable occurrence?"

To my knowledge, no one had ever before got that far in a contention with Julian. The effect upon him was astonishing. He had been tuning up his whistle, until it sounded like a kettle on the hob. Suddenly he shifted the gears, as it were; he smiled benignly and spoke with elaborate deference:

"You have all heard my story, and of course it is incredible. I can only add my own conclusion: I am not mentally responsible."

"What?" roared Ellery. "This is more than I can stand—entirely too much!"

GODALMING, senior, stamped back and forth in front of the fireplace. There was a twitter of suppressed excitement among the friends of the family, and the aunts were utterly amazed.

A great-uncle of Julian's had eloped with a tight-rope walker, and both a grandfather and a cousin had served terms in Congress, but there had been no other traces of subnormal mentality in the family.

I noticed that Hathaway apparently took no stock in Julian's astonishing statement, for his eyes narrowed and a wrathful wave of color crept up, just above his collar. He spoke severely:

"Will you be good enough to explain yourself, sir?"

Julian cleared his throat.

"With pleasure," he said unctuously. "The fact is, I seem to be suffering from a hallucination that I am insane."

"Oh, this is too much," old Ellery groaned, flopping into a chair. It was the only time I ever saw him chew his whiskers.

"Can you describe this hallucination?" Hathaway persisted.

"Hardly," said Julian blandly.

Hathaway made a hopeless gesture. He was inwardly so indignant that I believe he would have had Julian committed for contempt, if we had been in a court.

CHAPTER IV.

JULIAN SPEAKS HIS PIECE

E might have been guessing yet, if Candace had not entered the room at that moment. With a radiant smile that showed her white little teeth, she walked straight up to Julian and kissed him.

"I'm so glad you are here, dear," she murmured, and we wondered at her manner, she seemed so cool and blithe. She tossed her hat on a table and fussed a moment with the great mop of braided brown hair that was coiled around her head.

"Do you remember Johnny Devoe?" she asked.

"Never heard of him," Julian replied.

She laughed lightly, and her eyes danced.

"Johnny Devoe is the man you pulled into the shell-hole at the front. He's quite sure he owes his life to you."

"So?"

"And it happens that Johnny is the sweetheart of your later friend —or is she only an acquaintance, Julian?—Miss Nora O'Brien?"

"O'Brien? O'Brien?" sputtered

old Ellery. "That's the name of the woman——"

"Quite so, Mr. Godalming," she interrupted. "She is the roguish Irish beauty. Johnny says she is the Queen of the Bronx. I've been calling on him."

"Candace!" expostulated Mrs. Fitz-Warren, one of the aunts.

"Oh, I took Larkin in the car with me, and we were chaperoned throughout the interview by Johnny's mother. It was quite proper."

Hathaway seemed apprehensive.

"I hope you were circumspect in your dealings with these people, Candace. Tampering with a witness——"

"I did not see Nora. She works in Brooklyn and is away from home all day. But she lives with Mrs. Devoe. Think of riding from the Bronx to Brooklyn and back every day! Oo-o-o-o! I shouldn't like to live in that stuffy tenement, either."

Candace rang for tea. She was in high spirits and would not tell any more about her adventure until the business of balancing cups began. When she had poured for every one, she continued her tale:

"Mrs. Devoe is a motherly old creature, and when I stated my business she insisted I must see her Johnny. It seems Johnny flew into a rage last night when he heard Nora's account of her experience.

"You see, they are engaged. Said Johnny, 'I'll find that fresh guy and lick him within an inch of his life.'

"Mrs. Devoe and Nora had some difficulty in restraining him from taking the warpath immediately. It's just as well they succeeded. He is nearly as big as you, Larry."

She glanced at Julian mischievously, but he never batted an eye.

"Johnny was bent on starting an offensive this morning, until he looked at a newspaper and there discovered that the subway Lothario who had offended the poor but honest colleen was none other than our hero Julian."

"I wish you'd stop kidding me," Julian grumbled.

"Mrs. Devoe and I were having a wonderful gossip this morning—the Devoes ar-re descinded from Irish kings—when in came Johnny, who had just finished his work—in a gymnasium. Now, Johnny had not been quite sure that the 'feller in the pa-aper was the sa-ame wan that saved me life.' I straightened him out on that point. And so," she concluded triumphantly, "he has promised that Nora shall not appear against Julian."

There was a polite silence. Candace looked from one to another of us questioningly.

"Has it occurred to you, Candace," her father explained, "that the failure of the prosecuting witness to appear will not satisfy our requirements? Julian would go free automatically, but the disgrace would cling to him as before. He must be exonerated in court."

"I don't see why," she contended. "I'm sure Julian must have conducted himself like a gentleman. And what if he did flirt? Pretty much every one flirts."

PERHAPS, if Candace had not expressed her opinion so flatly, the Godalming-O'Brien case might have expired on the spot.

Her statement was unanimously opposed, except by Julian and me, who were not asked for our views. The aunts felt that they really could not be expected to attend the wedding, if Julian were to remain under suspicion, for that occasion would permit the press to air the whole

scandal again, possibly dragging in their names.

The friends of the family were pained at the mere thought that every one flirted; indeed, they themselves had never cast an eye at a man.

Old Ellery's protest was long and somewhat involved. The gist of it was that he had suffered spiritual and mental anguish that could only be assuaged, as he put it, by vindication in a court of law. He must insist on a trial, providing it was quite sure that there would be no conviction.

Candace held out stoutly against them, and there was a heated argument for half an hour with no prospect of an agreement. Suddenly, I had a positive inspiration.

"Suppose Nora O'Brien should refuse to drop the charge?" I asked.

"It makes no difference whether she does or not," Candace retorted tartly. "She can't satisfy all of us."

At that, Mrs. Fitz-Warren, who had been shocked into comparative reticence by Julian's extraordinary statement, focussed her lorgnette upon him quite deliberately.

"I fail to see," she remarked with a shudder, "how the O'Brien person's attitude can affect the lunacy question."

Candace had been ignorant of that phase of the case; so, they went back to the first tee and started around the course again.

There were seven different conceptions of Julian's hallucination, and the proceedings reminded me of an intercollegiate debate. Somehow, Candace managed to catch the drift of the arguments—I'll be blessed if I could—and, ignoring the rest of the party, she turned a devastating glance upon Julian, and said briefly and graciously and most suspiciously:

"I think I understand Julian's symptoms perfectly. They have been developing for some time in his head—abnormal growth and excessive bone structure. If you will leave him to me, I am sure the trouble can be eliminated by judicious treatment."

I began to smell a rat. Candace's manner was just like her father's, and there was the glint in her eye that I had seen in his when he took Julian over the jumps. Although her statement puzzled the relatives and friends, Hathaway apparently knew what she meant.

"In any event," he remarked dryly, "we should investigate the legal possibilities of the case thoroughly, particularly in respect to Nora O'Brien's version of the affair."

THE aunts and friends cleared out slowly, the women chattering incessantly. Julian was whistling; but it was an apprehensive whistle now. He was losing his nerve. How Candace got rid of old Ellery I don't recall, but she did.

"Wait for us in the library, please, Larry," she told me.

What happened at Candace's conference with Julian and her father has never been disclosed, but I know that it all happened to Julian.

There were five hundred and thirty-six books along the north wall of the library, between the windows; I counted them twice. I had started counting up the east wall for a change, and in the middle of the second shelf Hathaway came out. He went on downstairs.

About six hundred volumes later. Candace entered, followed by Julian.

Once I saw a shaggy collie that had been clipped close. The dog was obviously humiliated and was

trying to crawl under a couch to hide his nakedness. He was also inclined to feel resentful. Julian made me think of the collie. He was like a sheepish kid at school. Candace waited for him to speak his piece.

"I suppose I made an ass of myself, Larry," he said. "But they irritated me beyond expression. Candace wants me to tell you the truth; I never have had any hallucination, and I'll thank you if you forget my statement. I will explain to the others without delay."

His explanation took a load off my mind, for I knew that if a lunacy commission sat Hathaway would make me look up all the hallucination cases from Joan of Arc to the Bellevue alcoholic ward.

"We have also decided that Julian must be exonerated in court," Candace informed me. "So, Dad has told me to ask you to call on Nora O'Brien tonight and get her story. Please bear in mind, though, that we want her to appear as complaining witness."

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure," I declared gallantly, although I thought it was by rights Julian's job.

"Don't attempt to influence her in any way, Larry," Candace continued. "And avoid argument. You'll find them quite interesting—if you can manage Johnny Devoe."

CHAPTER V.

THE ROGUISH IRISH BEAUTY

IN preparation for my call on the roguish Irish beauty I put on my best bib and tucker and added a touch or two for good measure, for, of course, a chap on a diplomatic errand should look fit.

It was my chauffeur's night off, but the runabout purred like a kitten, and in no time I was bowling along at a lively clip in Van Cortlandt Park.

Suddenly I remembered that the road map had been left in the door pocket of the limousine. The Polo Grounds was the only place I knew north of Central Park. Far from discouraging me, my ignorance only added the zest of my exploration to my adventure.

The Bronx is about midway, I should judge, between the Grand Central Terminal and the Yale Bowl. The population, at least by night, consists almost entirely of children who play in the streets, where they develop an amazing facility for collecting in front of an approaching automobile and attempting to get run over. When the car stops, they continue the game by throwing themselves against the wheels and fenders.

After spending half an hour in traversing seven solid blocks of children, I left the car at a garage and proceeded afoot.

A policeman who spoke English directed me to the address. The Devoes lived in a red brick tenement. I knocked at all of the hallway doors and was twice admitted to the wrong homes, from which I extricated myself with some difficulty owing to my total ignorance of foreign tongues. On reaching the fourth floor front, I was losing my enthusiasm.

"Is this the home of Mrs. Devoe?" I shouted, knocking.

"Come in," was the reply.

"I hope I'm not intruding," I ventured politely on entering.

It was apparently a combination drawing room and kitchen, furnished with a piano, a gas range, a horsehair couch, a clothes basket, a deal table covered with a red cloth, and some nondescript chairs.

A skinny young woman was tack-

ing down oilcloth in front of the range. She wore a green satin skirt and a white silk shirt-waist, and her hair was red.

As she turned to look at me over her shoulder, her mouth was drawn down at the corners, and above her long upper lip her pug nose and foxy little eyes were screwed into a squint, as if she were near-sighted.

"Whaddaye want?" she demanded in a rich brogue.

"I am looking for your mistress," I replied, presenting my card.

"Come off. Don't pull any of that stuff on me. If ye want Mother Devoe, she's at the Flannigan wake."

"Then I should like to see Miss Nora O'Brien," I countered firmly.

"Well, come in and shut the door, can't ye?" And she shouted at the top of her lungs: "Hey, Johnny, Mister Jess Willard is calling on Miss Nora O'Brien."

She laughed at her pleasantry, and I smiled diplomatically. On Johnny's appearance from a rear room, she glanced at my card:

"Mister Wheeler, meet Cyclone Johnny Devoe."

JOHNNY was a sizable chap over six feet two, who bulged on all sides in a green sweater. He had a heavy square jaw and a cauliflower ear.

"Howdy," he grunted. "Guess you remember me."

The name of Johnny Devoe had sounded familiar to me in a vague way, but for the life of me I could not place the fellow.

I had never known the identity of the man Julian rescued in France until Candace disclosed it. Johnny's manner now was distinctly hostile. He spoke like a man with a grudge.

"Did we meet on the other side?" I asked.

"Right." It had a belligerent sound. "Now, what's on yer mind?"

"I wish to see Miss Nora O'Brien," I replied impressively.

"Never mind about Nora O'Brien. I'll talk for the both of us. Go on wid yer story."

I had counted upon the presence of Miss O'Brien for a sort of inspiration, not only on account of her charms, but because a cultured young woman of her type would sympathize with Candace and Julian —and, perhaps, with me. Johnny was entirely too high-handed about it, and I demurred politely but firmly.

"Stop yer kiddin', ye big boob. I'm Nora O'Brien."

It was the red-headed girl who spoke.

I was amazed, bewildered. For a minute I stood speechless, trying to collect my thoughts. The forbidding look on Johnny's face was proof positive that they were not chaffing me. Yet, the roguish Irish beauty— I was dumbfounded!

"Come out of yer trance," Johnny exclaimed.

I am afraid I stated my case lamely, for the shock had completely upset my plan of campaign, which included offhand references to Nora's beauty and aristocratic lineage.

"You see, I am an old friend of Miss Hathaway and Mr. Godalming, and I have come here as her representative," I stated. "She has asked me to get Miss O'Brien's version of the incident."

"Why?" Johnny snapped.

"Because—er—as a matter of fact, I don't know."

"Har! I s'pose she didn't tell ye."

"Quite so." I breathed a little easier. "But we insist on threshing out the case in court, and consequently we wish to urge that Miss O'Brien appear to press the charge."

"Who are 'we'? Did Cap'n Godalming insist?"

"Um-m-no," I admitted. Johnny

snorted, and I continued: "You see, we can prove his innocence, if Miss O'Brien will push the case."

"How?" He seemed awfully dense.

"Why, my dear chap, the idea of his flirting with Miss O'Brien is simply preposterous on the face of it. No jury would ever convict him."

HATHAWAY had a lordly way of bluffing litigants, and I copied his manner. The effect on Johnny was just opposite to what I had anticipated.

"Whadda ye mean, on the face of it?" he roared. "Are ye castin' up at Nora O'Brien's face?"

"Not at all," I declared. Miss O'Brien is a—er—a roguish Irish beauty—er—according to the press, and——"

"Cut out the bunk," Nora interrupted. "Tell the big stiff where he gets off, Johnny."

Johnny arose and hitched up his trousers, as if he were clearing for action.

"Look-a-here," he began. "You're the guy what had 'em put me on kitchen police over there. Remember that? Naw? Well, I do. And I swore then that I'd get even wid ye some day. Now ye come here and insult my girl. I know what yer after. Yer in love wid Miss Hathaway yerself."

My protests were brushed aside. I was becoming uneasy.

"Aw, tell it to Sweeney," he rattled on. "Ye want to send her steady to the cooler, so's you can cut him out. That's why yer asking Nora to go to court and prosecute.

"Well, there's nothing doing of that, me bucko. Get that straight. Nora stays right here. You're a cheap far-downer, trying to double-cross yer friend. Now that I told ye what I think of ye, I'm going to lick ye, ye big stuffed shirt!'

I was really incensed at this outburst, but I clung to the hope that I might save the day by diplomacy.

"Nora, get out of the room," he ordered, rolling his waistband over his belt. "From now on, this party is for gents only."

"I'll go get a ambulance," she flung over her shoulder as she went out.

"Really, I didn't come here to fight you," I assured him.

"Ye big fat stiff. Stand up."

JOHNNY squared off, and I arose to expostulate, holding out my hand by way of admonition. It nettled me to be called fat, for I always had spent an hour a day in a gym to keep down my weight; my midriff was like a washboard.

But my resentment over Johnny's characterization was as nothing compared with my forebodings as to Hathaway's cutting comments on my adventure.

I am sorry to say that Johnny, after a sudden feint, came in with an overhand right that caught me on the left eye. It was lucky for me that we clinched, for the blow knocked me groggy, and I saw stars.

After my head cleared, he broke away from me, and we milled around for a couple of minutes. He was a pretty clever bird, a little slow, but strong as a bull. I was never fast myself and, to tell the truth, it looked like a toss-up as to which one could first land a finishing punch.

If a boxer has a trick, he usually tries it more than once. I had a hunch that the feint for the body and the overhand right was a favorite of Johnny's. The way he worked it, with a shift, gave a chance to side-step and shoot in a straight right. Twice he half started the feint, and I backed away. The third

time I side-stepped and crossed my right.

Nora, who had been watching us from a doorway, yelled like a Comanche. The woman's rage knew no bounds. After fishing Johnny out of the clothes basket and depositing him upon the couch, I asked her to get some water so that we could bathe his head.

She only reviled me the more, and in desperation I went back into the other room to find a basin and a faucet. When I returned, she had flung up the window and was clambering out to the fire escape. There was a shiny metal object in her hand.

"My God, girl, don't jump!" I exclaimed. "You're on the fourth floor!"

"Never fear," she shouted back spitefully. And she began blowing a police whistle.

The adult population of the Bronx, which had been missing from the streets, was evidently housed in the Devoe tenement. Men and women swarmed into the room, and the overflow crowded the halls and stairways. A policeman had a hard time of it shouldering his way through the mob.

"What's the trouble here?" he growled.

"I want this man arrested," Nora shrieked.

"What's the charge?"

Nora reflected.

"I can't appear in two cases at wanst, can I?"

Johnny opened his eyes and dreamily surveyed the throng. The officer addressed him:

"Are you the complaining witness?"

"Sure," Johnny assented. "Assault and battery."

"Officer, this is an outrage," I declared with dignity, although I had to look at him sidewise on account of my black eye.

"Did you hit him?"

"Perhaps I did," I replied.

"Did you, or didn't you?"

"He struck me first," I insisted. "And I am entirely blameless."

"A-ah," he scoffed, "that's what they all say."

So we were bundled off to the station, where Johnny and I preferred charges of assault against each other.

CHAPTER VI.

REPORTERS AND LIP ROUGE

THE Godalming-Hathaway-O'Brien case was now becoming complicated. My unfamiliarity with journalistic methods of gathering police news did not help matters.

When a pleasant young chap at the station house—he said he was a reporter speaking for his colleagues as well as himself—asked me about the row, I informed him that I should like to have the story suppressed.

Without further ado, he dropped the matter. We chatted on other subjects. As he evinced a polite interest in my football days, I reminisced a bit, and the conversation drifted on to my family, about which he had been somehow misinformed, for I was obliged to correct several of his observations in that connection.

We got on famously together. He was really an exceptionally clever fellow. My regret over misstatements that had appeared in press reports of Julian's arrest surprised him; in fact, he was at first incredulous. But I pointed out various inaccuracies, and when I pictured the distress of the Godalmings and the Hathaways over the incident he listened

not only sympathetically but with rising indignation. I wish I could now recall the name of his paper; he was a very good sort.

Our conversation was interrupted by an untidy little man who used scent and wore a diamond sunburst for a scarfpin. He handed me a soiled business card, and I read thereon:

ISIDORE GLUCKSTEIN

He obligingly offered to bail me out. Unfortunately, who should appear upon the scene at that moment but Oliver Hathaway!

Those ubiquitous reporters—not including my own friend, of course—had already made inquiries at the Hathaway home and imparted the news to the whole family. Mr. Hathaway arranged with the police captain for my release under bonds.

I shall omit the distressing details of our conversation on the way downtown in his limousine. It is hard to believe that a friend could profanely spurn a perfectly reasonable suggestion that he stop off at the club to get a piece of beefsteak for a fellow's damaged eye, but that is a lamentable fact. Before I retired for the night I had to send my man out for some leeches, which I loathe.

HICKS had just run my tub in the morning, when Julian blew in.

"Awfully good of you to come so early, old man," I observed nonchalantly. "Had breakfast?"

"Breakfast be damned," he retorted. "Haven't you seen the papers?"

"Not yet. What's up?" I replied with secret misgivings.

"Here." Julian jerked open my paper and flung it upon the table before me. "Amuse yourself."

There on the first page, alongside an article on the Peace Conference, was a heading:

ONE-ROUND WHEELER
WHIPS CHAMPION OF
GODALMING'S ACCUSER

Johnny Devoe, Pugilist, Thrashed by Ex-Football Star in Fight in Girl's Home

Pretty Colleen Sees Bout

She Asserts Giant Athlete Tried to Make Her Press Flirting Charge Against His Friend

The story was embellished with two pictures. That of the "pretty colleen" resembled Nora no more than I resembled a Chinese pagoda. Nor was the second illustration, which was underlined Lawrence Wheeler, a likeness of me.

Evidently a mistake had been made, for the picture was a half-length of Johnny Devoe, with his pomaded hair curled above the cauliflower ear and his torso clad in ill-fitting full-dress clothes.

"This is a dastardly outrage," I exclaimed, contemplating Johnny's plebeian features with my good eye. "I will sue them for libel."

"Sue for libel? You?" Julian hooted. "You poor fish, you can thank your lucky stars if we're not all thrown into jail for attempting to suborn a witness."

On diverting my attention from the picture for the moment, I found that there was justification for his remark.

While I had been conversing with my friend the reporter, presumably one or more of his colleagues had interviewed Nora. As published, her story of the affair was both verbose and mendacious.

It stated substantially that I had burst into the Devoe home unbid-

den, and had demanded that she appear against Julian, who was my rival for the hand of Candace. On being balked of my fell purpose through the intercession of her doughty sweetheart, so the story ran, I had hit the unsuspecting Johnny over the head from behind with a flatiron.

Too late I realized that my reticence toward the press had been costly.

"What," I asked, "what do the Hathaways think?"

"Hathaway threatens to call off the wedding. He has gone down to see a friend of his who is a magistrate."

"And Candace?"

"She's over in Brooklyn, trying to dig up Nora O'Brien and fetch her to court."

"How did she take the news?"

"She declares we're a couple of blithering idiots," he wailed, adding maliciously, "That's what I get for pal-ing with you."

I ate in silence—that is to say, I abandoned conversation for a time. At length I asked:

"Then there is nothing I can do for the present?"

"Nor for the future. I think you have done everything possible—everything," Julian declared with emphasis. "However, I am glad you have at last stowed away the basket of eggs. As soon as you have subjugated that sixth chop, I hope to take you downtown."

I demurred.

"It happens that Hicks has gone off in a taxi to fetch Maizie Delamere. You know Maizie. She was in the Ten O'clock Revue."

"Never heard of her."

"Then I'll introduce you," I promised. "She's a stunning young thing—English."

"Good Lord, Jumbo——"

"That will do, Mule," I exclaimed, now thoroughly aroused. "I refuse to stir from this apartment until my eye has been painted."

THE opportune arrival of Hicks, with Maizie in tow, averted a prolonged argument upon this point.

"My word, Larry," she gasped. "That chap certainly did hand you a shiner, wot?"

Julian suggested facetiously that I advertise for bids from interior decorating concerns, whereupon I retorted:

"I can send for a portrait painter, you know, if you don't mind the delay."

This subdued Julian, but he did not remain in that state, owing to the fact that the usually reliable Hicks, in presenting my compliments to Maizie, had extended an invitation for her to breakfast with me—at least, she averred that this had been her understanding.

Maizie was chattering gaily over a sliced orange when the telephone rang and Hicks, who answered the call, confirmed my apprehension. It was a message for Julian.

"That was Mr. Hathaway," he announced as he hung up the receiver. "We are to meet him immediately."

Maizie seemed oblivious to the need for haste on our part. She was not working at the time, and evidently she looked upon invitations for chow like unto showers of manna.

Julian utterly disregarded the amenities of the occasion, pacing the room, looking at his watch ostentatiously and glaring at me. I could foresee disastrous consequences, if Maizie's appetite held out, but I assumed the air of insouciance befitting a host, and in that mood casually suggested a third helping of chops. To my dismay, she acquiesced.

Taking a stance before me with

arms folded, Julian transfixed me with a steely eye:

"Are you coming to court or not?" he thundered.

"Oh, do sit down and behave," Maizie chirped. "You make me nervous."

Julian rudely persisted:

"Why can't you paint him up now—immediately?"

"My dear fellow, I don't carry me grease paints about." She winked at me, and added, with a shrug: "Of course if you have a makeup box with you——"

"Balderdash," he retorted.

The girl tossed her head saucily and speared a roll with her fork. While she continued stoking, Julian and I argued it out.

We finally compromised on a camouflage of lip rouge over which Maizie laid a heavy coating of powder. The effect was ghastly. Nevertheless, I set out with Julian, leaving her there to finish her breakfast alone.

CHAPTER VII.

A SHRINKING VIOLET

N OUR journey downtown, Julian acted as if he were William Hohenzollern personally conducting Marshal Foch to jail. We did not speak. I remember having thought at the time that there would be a pretty how-de-do if Nora should prove that he had thrown kisses at her, or something like that.

It would serve him right, I meditated, and for the first time that morning my features relaxed into a smile, which I checked hastily, however, on account of the powder on my eye beginning to crack.

Alongside the curb at the Police Court we found the Hathaway limousine drawn up. Enthroned upon the rear seat was Johnny Devoe, who was at the moment carelessly flicking the ashes off a Corona. Nora was beside him, stiff as a poker.

Several photographers, evidently newspaper fellows, were poking their cameras through the open windows to snap the couple. A crowd of curious wayfarers was rapidly collecting. The embarrassment, not to say humiliation, of the footman and the chauffeur was painfully obvious:

It was my duty as a friend of the family to put a stop to such nonsense, but Julian grabbed me by the sleeve and insisted we must not tarry. He headed straight for the Magistrate's chambers.

Apparently, Hathaway had been pulling some wires. We found there Ellery Godalming, Hathaway and Candace. Candace was telling how she had rounded up Johnny in the Bronx and Nora in Brooklyn.

"Nora's account of Julian's conduct in the car is really unintelligible to me," she said. "She insists he was philandering, whatever that may mean, and when I press her for details she sulks and shuts up like a clam.

"You'll be unable to make any headway with her, Dad, but get on the right side of Johnny. He can manage Nora, and I can promise his help, if you'll only keep him good-natured."

It was downright ungrateful of Candace to take matters into her own hands in this way, after all I had done.

"If you do not require my further services," I remarked icily, "I shall welcome an opportunity to go out and have my eye properly painted."

Hathaway looked at me over his pince-nez.

"Young man, there is an assault charge pending against you which will be taken up after the O'Brien affair is disposed of. Meanwhile,

I should suggest that you and your eye remain here."

"Now, when I bring them in, don't forget that you must greet them like old friends," Candace continued, addressing all of us. "You must not look worried, Mr. Godalming. Smile, if you please. That's better."

After starting out, she popped her head back through the doorway to add: "And remember to shake hands all around."

My gorge rose.

"I don't mind shaking hands with Johnny," I announced. "But as for that prevaricating little monster with him—I'll be darned if I do."

Neither their threats nor their arguments could move me. I was adamant. Hathaway even suggested adroitly that it was to my interest, even more than Julian's, to make peace with Nora.

"I'll go to jail first," I declared.

SUDDENLY, a knock at the door heralded the coming of Candace and the Bronx contingent. Julian, his father and Hathaway stood up. Old Ellery, who had been scowling at me, immediately re-arranged his features, so that they wore a vacuous grin. Hathaway motioned for Julian to lead the party.

As Julian opened the door, disclosing Candace at the threshold with Devoe and Nora, there was an explosion and a blinding flash. Ellery dodged behind me. Julian clutched his breast convulsively and collapsed, Hathaway catching him just as he was falling.

I had seen fellows bowled over like that at the front. Without a moment's hesitation, I rushed out and seized Nora before she could have a chance to escape.

Confusion reigned. While I clung to Nora, convinced that she alone of the persons there would have taken a pot shot at poor Julian, Johnny strenuously tried to free her. I could not see the rest of the party for smoke. Everyone was talking at once.

Now, if Nora had shot Julian my presence of mind would have merited commendation, for it is a fact that none of the others of our party had sensed the need of acting with promptness and decision. It was merely my misfortune that nothing of the sort had occurred, the dramatic moment having been caused by a pestiferous photographer with a flashlight.

Fortune favored me, however, in one respect. They were too much concerned over Julian to indulge in criticism of me for my mistake in grabbing Nora. As his governor eased him into a chair, Julian was white as your collar.

"Don't mind me," he muttered. "I'll be all right in a minute. It's only a little reminder of the old trouble."

Candace waved the others away while she fussed over him; but she had an eye to the main chance nevertheless.

"You see, Mr. Devoe," she purred, "he is really a sick man. You know how shell shock cases are."

"Sure," Johnny assented glibly. "And I know where he got his. It was the day he saved me life."

"Chip of the old block," Ellery mumbled.

It was up to me to do something, so I volunteered:

"Suppose I carry him out to the car, Candace?"

"Rats!" Julian pulled himself together. "I'm all right now, Jumbo."

He straightened up, still a bit twitchy, and looked about with a reassuring smile. As his gaze fell upon Nora the smile broadened.

"Look!" Nora pointed at him.

"He's at it again. That's what he done in the subway."

We were thunderstruck. Hathaway intervened:

"Will you be good enough to explain your meaning, young woman?"

"He's a-winkin' at me," Nora contended.

Sure enough, Julian's right eye was twitching at irregular intervals for all the world as if he were wig-wagging messages to the girl.

"I beg your pardon," he said suavely. "It's quite involuntary."

"Well I dunno whether you felt involuntary in the subway," Nora argued, "but that's what you was after doing."

The bottom having thus fallen out of the O'Brien-Godalming case, Ellery was for rushing into court immediately for a legal and complete vindication of Julian. Hathaway restrained him.

"Do you still wish to prosecute Mr. Wheeler?" he asked Nora and Johnny.

Johnny hemmed and hawed, undecided, but Nora replied viciously:

"You bet yer life."

"One moment, please," Julian pleaded. "I think you will change your mind if I recall something to you, Devoe. After I got you onto my back that day in France, a one-fifty-five burst near enough, you remember, to put us both out of commission. We should most certainly have been killed right there, if another fellow had not taken the two of us under his arms and hauled us in. You've never known who that other man was, have you?"

"Naw," said Johnny.

"Being a shrinking violet, he made me promise not to tell our friends here at home. He was afraid they would gush over him. I'm going to tell his name now."

But the newspapers published that part of the story in the course of their long, soppy accounts of how "the roguish Irish beauty threw herself at the feet of the shell-shocked hero of St. Mihiel and, weeping bitterly, begged his forgiveness for the deep mental anguish he had suffered on account of her mistake, due to his affliction."

Nora did nothing of the kind. After Johnny Devoe and I had buried the hatchet and shaken hands on it, we dropped the charges and everyone went home.

It's true, Candace did throw her arms around me and kiss me in the region of my damaged eye. And she wept a little. But that was nothing. It was Julian she married.

Witch Spawn

By WOLCOTT LECLEAR BEARD

LEAVES and palm-fronds rustled pleasantly in a rising breeze that came over the China Sea. Tempered sunlight filtered through their dense greenery and shone through many windows to fall upon a table most temptingly set. Yet Jimmy Varnham pushed away his plate from which little had been taken.

Lois reproachfully shook her head.

It was a very lovely head, and even at that moment a fresh realization of this fact afforded Jimmy a gleam of satisfaction. They hadn't been married very long.

"I'm not very hungry somehow," he said apologetically. "I'd like another cup of coffee, though; it seems to hit me right where I live."

"I'm glad," she nodded, refilling his cup. I made it myself."

"Why?" he asked perfunctorily; then disgustedly answered his own question.

"I see. I'd forgotten. All the servants have gone to join the other fools, of course. Gaping at the prison doors, or scrambling for a place over——"

Finishing the sentence with a wag of his head, he sipped his coffee in moody silence. Lois sat watching him with frowning solicitude. His haggard face just now looked far older than its seven-and-twenty years. Her heart swelled with indignation at the sight.

JIMMY was Supervisor of Pangasinán. Not only its chief engineer, that is to say, but also the executive head of that huge province. As such he had more work than any one man should be asked to do. To saddle him in addition with a ghastly job like this was an outrage—nothing less!

It was the Philippine Commission's fault. Its members had

adopted the old Spanish laws *en bloc* to serve as makeshifts until they could get around to passing other and—possibly—better ones.

They knew, therefore, that if a criminal were executed it would have to be done by the *garrote*. Then why, in the name of common sense, didn't those who decreed that task send somebody from Manila to superintend it, instead of wishing the ghastly job onto poor Jimmy?

It was the first affair of its kind ever ordered by Uncle Sam's law. No American in the province and very few elsewhere had any first-hand knowledge of the necessary procedure. There might readily happen some terrible blunder, and this was the reason why Jimmy personally had attended to all the arrangements. That was his idea of duty.

They hailed from Massachusetts, those two, so Lois also was afflicted with a New England conscience. It was troubling her now.

"Jimmy," said she, pleadingly, "I can't get that poor old woman out of my mind. It's so awful—and she's so horribly alone. If I could be with her——"

"You stay where you are!" snapped Jimmy, interrupting. "You've been mixed up in the beastly mess too much as it is. But—listen!"

It was the sound of many voices that reached their ears. There were whoops and yells and bursts of jeering laughter. Lois shuddered. Jimmy swore, and kicked back his chair.

"They've started from the prison," he cried, "and that's the rabble taggin' along behind!"

THE HOUSE, like all other houses thereabouts, was raised on high stilts. Jimmy sprang down the steps three at a time, led out his horse, which had been tied to a ring on one of the great pillars, and swung into the saddle. The rider's haste was felt by his blooded mount, as horses always do sense such things. Those voices were very close now—just beyond a turn of the road.

Dashing through the open gateway of the compound, Jimmy raced in the opposite direction. He rounded a corner, then drew rein and slowed to a walk. There was time enough, now—too much time. The plaza lay before him.

It was an accustomed scene in Jimmy's daily life. It presented itself to his eyes whenever he raised them from the work on his desk, and he had grown to love the gay, peaceful little park.

Then, only two days before, a sinister change had begun, reluctantly wrought by himself. Now, for the first time, he beheld that change at its peak.

THE PLAZA was thronged. From Sual, Salasa, Dagupan, Binmaley, Calisiáo—from all the thirty-seven provincial towns, in short—the people had flocked by thousands. And now they were trampling the flower-beds in order to command a view of the newly-built scaffold with its fixed chair, the dangling straps and the simple machine of glittering brass that was soon to snuff out a human life.

What would they see? Ghastly justice or an unspeakably horrible mistake? The former, Jimmy believed. With all the strength of his soul he wished that he might be sure.

In the beginning there had been no doubt. True, this case of Mariano Ricafólt was a heritage from the Spanish régime, then newly ended. But in their records, captured by the Americans with this provincial capital of Lingayén, there was a de-

tailed account of his trial, conviction and sentence, on overwhelming evidence, for a brutal murder.

Two American courts, one provincial, one insular, had reviewed this evidence, approved the sentence and directed that it be carried out.

When informed of his coming fate Mariano, with characteristic racial fatalism, had made no demur. He had merely requested that he might see his old mother before he died.

It was Lois who had gone to that mother. She had insisted upon going because she hoped that the fearful news might be softened a little if brought by another woman. She had found Maria Ricafólt, crippled and bent, hated but feared even more as a witch, dwelling on the edge of a distant *barrio*, alone except for a gnome-like idiot who was her sole attendant.

Repelled instinctively, but forcing herself to put the repulsion aside, Lois had brought the pair back to Lingayén.

They had been on their way when the old woman had remarked—quite casually, as though it were a well-known fact—that her son was innocent; that there had been no conviction—no trial—no murder. That the pretended account had been written into the records just as the Spaniards were leaving and been left for the Americans to find.

It had been done, she said, in order to clear the title of a cocoanut grove upon which Mariano had a lien. And then she would say no more.

Lois had told Jimmy. Hoping, but exceedingly doubtful, the two had carried their tale to the provincial judge, who had been more doubtful still, though somewhat troubled. So he had called Benito Manaláng into their council.

Educated, sauve, a man of substance, Benito often had been consulted by the Americans in matters of local history.

Now, when the story was repeated to him, he smiled with tolerant pity, and shook his head.

Of course Mariano Ricafólt had been tried. He, Benito, had been present at that trial. He was sorry for the old witch, but as for her "spawn"—well, he was getting no more than he richly deserved!

That settled it. The delayed execution again was ordered to proceed. Hence the crowd through which Jimmy's horse was nervously forcing its way.

Whether Mariano had been justly condemned or not that crowd, perhaps, did not know. But most certainly it did not care. It didn't regard the condemned man as a human being; merely as "witch-spawn," a species of noxious vermin which was to be destroyed in a manner calculated to afford an agreeable spectacle.

SO THE crowd was laughing and chattering now, but there was no telling how long this mood would last. Witches and their male equivalents are very real things in the Philippine Archipelago which, after all, is only the ragged fringe of Malaysia; and the Malay nature is sometimes liable to fits of berserk fury.

It was to guard against such a possibility that a cordon of hand-picked police armed with riot-guns were drawn up in a hollow square which surrounded the scaffold and a little space around it, into which Jimmy rode.

A hush fell over the crowd. It was like the expectant stillness which precedes the rise of the curtain at a theatre. It was followed by a prolonged "Ah-h-h!" as the clank of accoutrements, together with the

rattle of loose spokes and worn running-gear, was heard.

Then silence once more as the condemned man came into view.

He came in an open carriage, shabby and ramshackle, but the best—indeed the only one—to be had. Jimmy had been at great pains to procure it, for it was required by law. So was the priest, whom it also contained; old Padre Felipe, whom both Lois and Jimmy respected deeply, and even loved, alien to his church though they were. So also was the new clothing, a blouse and trousers of shiny, black cotton, which Mariano wore.

A trusted native, one of Jimmy's foremen, was driving. On the box beside him the idiot crouched, with loose-hung slavering lips and frightened eyes forever glancing backward for reassurance at the mother who sat close to her son on this, his last ride.

JIMMY had seen her before, but never at so short a range nor in so good a light as now, when the carriage passed close to his horse. She was a wizened old woman, her tiny body bent like an interrogation-point. Her skirt of rich brocade and her *camiseta* of priceless *piña* cloth left Joseph's well-known coat simply nowhere as to color.

Her impassive face was brown and wrinkled almost past belief. Jimmy was incongruously reminded of a gay flower surmounted by a raisin with the heads of black pins for eyes.

Yet she was a woman, a mother who had come to see her only son die a felon's death. Jimmy had to remind himself of this; that she, after all, was human. So was her son, criminal though he might be; and in view of these facts he was forced to admit that both maintained a Stoic gameness that commanded sincere admiration from his Nordic soul.

The carriage stopped at the scaffold's foot. The priest alighted, and as he turned to help Mariano down, the silence was broken by a single voice, from somewhere in the crowd behind Jimmy's back.

"Take the witch also!" it shouted. "Strangle her, along with her spawn!"

White with anger, Jimmy brought his mount around in a volte.

"Silence!" he rasped in Spanish. "Another such word means a month in the chain-gang. That's a promise! Is it understood?"

It seemed to be. At all events, the silence now was broken only by the voice of the priest, who began to intone Latin prayers for the dying.

Jimmy glanced aside, down at Maria, still seated in the carriage. There was no stoicism now in that wizened face, but a concentrated hatred that he would not have thought any face could express. Those pin-head eyes seemed to blaze forth actual thin beams of malignant evil which his own eyes followed, to find themselves resting on Benito Manaláng.

Could he be the man who had shouted? That was hard to believe; it was so very unlike the customary dignity of his deportment. But the words had been spoken in grammatical Spanish and one might think, for that matter, that his dignity should have kept him quite away from the plaza at a time like this.

Yet there he was, standing up in his private *quiles*, which is a sort of overgrown governess-cart much affected by rich Filipinos, and therefore towering high above the crowd.

Never had Jimmy wholly liked him; never could he rid himself of the lurking notion that this suave individual was somewhat too sweet to

be wholesome. And never had he liked that portly native less than he did at this moment, as Benito watched the scaffold, smiling with bland approval of the proceedings there.

Those proceedings were reaching their climax now. Seating himself quite calmly, Mariano fitted his neck into the fatal brass collar. His arms and legs were swiftly strapped fast while the priest continued to intone prayers, holding a crucifix before the condemned man's eyes.

The padre's mellow voice ceased with an "amen" as the black-cap was pulled down over Mariano's face, wholly concealing it. Jimmy braced himself. There was one quick turn of the long screw-levers and a sharp crack, not loud but distinct, like a man snapping his fingers, as cervical verterbrae were forced apart.

It was done! Jimmy relaxed, slumping weakly in his saddle. He felt sick, but mentally offered fervent thanks for the end of that waking nightmare. He offered them too soon.

ASTOUNDING but unmistakable, there followed the sound of applause, each staccato smack assaulting the ears like an obscene word. It came from Benito Manaláng, who smiled with serene satisfaction and clapped his hands as he might have done at the end of a successful play.

There was a scream from old Maria Ricafólt. Startled, Jimmy looked around, to see that she had risen from her seat, supporting herself with one hand which rested on the idiot's shoulder.

The other skinny claw pointed with tremulous tenseness at Benito Manaláng. With inarticulate babbling, the idiot pawed at her beseechingly, but the stream of invective went on.

There was venom in the sound of every syllable—blistering venom! It bleached Benito's saddle-colored face to the bluish gray of dirty skimmilk as, taken by surprise, for the moment he stood spellbound, his hands poised in the act of clapping.

Those who were standing near him crossed themselves and shrank away as though they feared infection, leaving him alone in the midst of an open space—like a candle, lighted by the fire of that old woman's tongue and surrounded by a circle of its own light.

This couldn't go on—mustn't!

Apart from the scandal, there was the crowd, from which a sullen murmur of fear and anger began to arise as a threatening undertone to that shrieking treble.

"Hi!" he called to the driver of the carriage. "Get away from here—quick! To my house—at a gallop—go!"

THE driver yelled at his span and laid the bamboo rod that he used for a whip stingingly across their haunches. They sprang forward with a jerk that threw Maria back into her seat. The crowd scattered before them; they galloped through and were away.

Jimmy barked forth quick commands that sent two squads of police after the carriage at double time. He lingered for a moment to draw the remaining guards more closely around the scaffold, then spurred homeward, fuming as he went.

Jimmy had been exasperated almost to the point of quarreling with Lois when she had first brought Maria and that blasted, drooling idiot to the house.

But he saw now that she had been right. There was no other available place where those two more or less human derelicts could be kept safe until they were sent back where they belonged.

He passed the squads of trotting

policemen and overtook the rattling, ramshackle old carriage just before it entered the compound enclosing his house.

Attracted by the noise, Lois appeared in the open doorway of the house. He told her, very briefly, what had occurred—very angrily, too, when he started to speak.

THEN the carriage drew up close beside his horse. Maria had slipped downward in a little heap on the footboards, her face hidden in her arms which rested on the seat. Above her, sitting on the box but facing rearward, his splayed feet dangling, the loose-lipped idiot blubbered helplessly like a child that senses trouble which it cannot understand.

Jimmy's mind recalled the black-clad body still strapped in the chair on that scaffold in the plaza, and his anger faded away, leavingly only a mere trace of impatience behind.

"Confound the old woman!" he exclaimed. "If she'd only kept her toothless mouth shut——"

"If that slimy Manaláng had behaved with common decency——" sniffed Lois, interrupting.

She had no need to finish the sentence. Jimmy nodded assent to its evident meaning, and sat in his saddle moodily watching her. She had run down to the carriage and, gently urging Maria to rise, slipped an arm around her waist and was helping her up the steps while the idiot, now grinning with tears still undried on his cheeks, ambled along behind them.

The carriage drove away. Jimmy frowned, and his face was troubled.

Strangely enough, even though her back was turned, old Maria seemed to be aware of his antagonism and, more strangely still, he was not in the least surprised. Facing about upon reaching the top of the steps, she pierced him with these pin-head eyes.

"The night is big with vengeance that struggles for birth," she croaked. "Its soul moans with pain. But into this house no evil shall enter; and the morning's sun will shed peace."

Then she hobbled away, into the house, still supported by Lois, with the idiot close behind.

Jimmy frowned again, and thoughtfully lighted a cigarette. The impression she had made was creepy—eerie—uncanny, as though it were something that wasn't natural. He hated to admit it, but he had to.

Its only effect upon him, to be sure, was impatient exasperation at something he couldn't understand. But if that old woman could put even that much over on an educated, rather hard-boiled Anglo-Saxon, it was no wonder she was feared by these natives.

Swift darkness was gathering in.

Jimmy dismounted and was tying his horse as the two squads of police doubled into the compound and halted there. He posted sentries within the enclosure on all its four sides, with strict orders to prevent egress or ingress not authorized by Jimmy or Lois in person, and to shoot, not argue, if it became necessary to enforce those orders.

He had finished and was about to mount the steps when Lois again appeared.

"Oh, Jimmy," she cried, "do come here!"

Her tone was full of dismay. He followed her within the house, well knowing the spot to which she would lead him. It was a room that opened from the side of a trestle bridge connecting the kitchen and house proper, and it was here that Maria had been quartered.

"I helped her out of her *camiseta* and that heavy skirt," explained

Lois, "and tried to get her to lie down. But she wouldn't. She wouldn't even speak to me. She just went and——"

Lois finished the sentence with a gesture toward that little room. She was almost ready to cry, though she wasn't at all the weepy sort of girl; it was just that the strain of this beastly affair had been too much for her. Swearing under his breath, Jimmy went to the doorway and peered in.

In one corner the idiot had curled himself up, and was snoring loudly. In another squatted Maria.

The ancient crone's one remaining garment, a long, white chemise, fell in ample folds. It was a shapeless heap that gleamed in the dim light which rested upon her mask-like face, so incredibly furrowed that it seemed older by centuries than any living face. Its little eyes glittered and its thin lips seemed to mutter, though they made no sound.

Jimmy spoke to her. There was no reply; the two sparks of light in her eye sockets never wavered, and her lips moved soundlessly, as before.

With an air of indifference carefully assumed for the benefit of his wife, Jimmy shrugged his own shoulders, laid his arm over hers and led her back across the trestle bridge into the cool *sala* of their house. There, with gentle force, he seated her in a long chair and perched himself on the broad teakwood sill of the nearest window.

"THAT woman is ill," said Lois, who had vainly waited for him to speak. "She needs a doctor—and Archie Campbell's 'way over there at San Jacinto. But there are native doctors in town. We ought to send for one."

Archie Campbell was the Provincial Physician, and San Jacinto was a town near the far border of the province. Jimmy nodded.

"I was thinking," he answered. "I doubt if any native doctor would enter this house, any more than the servants would, while that old woman and her hobgoblin are here.

"Besides, I'm not so sure she's really ill. That may be the way that witches always behave for anything we know to the contrary. But here, thank heaven, comes somebody who can tell us."

He was looking out of the window. Lois came and stood by his side. Her face brightened as his had done as he saw Padre Felipe cantering toward the house on his fat pony, the tails of his cassock flapping in the wind.

Jimmy brought him in, and they told him their trouble. He listened in sympathetic silence, his handsome, tired old face increasingly grave. He looked in through the doorway of that little room where the old woman still crouched in her corner, motionless except for her lips, and apparently oblivious to his presence. He sighed as he turned away.

"No," he said very sadly, "no physician is needed here."

"Then isn't she ill?" asked Lois.

"Soul-sick," was the reply. "God help her! He would, if she permitted, but there's no hope of that—not yet."

They had returned to the *sala*, where Padre Felipe wearily seated himself.

"Maria was right," he said. "The night *is* charged with evil. It is filled with warring thoughts, fear, black hatred and blacker revenge. And thought is force. It is the power of God."

"But does your church believe that God can be evil?" asked Lois, amazed.

"Indeed, no!" smiled the priest. "But for some reason, too deep for us to fathom, God permits the existence of evil, as we all know.

"Thought in itself is a mere blind, overwhelming force, good or evil according to the wish that prompts it. It is in the ability to consciously direct this force that lies the power of witches, as we call them. It is the only power there can be."

He paused. Lois puckered her brows in thought. Jimmy's face was incredulous, and unconsciously he glanced in the direction of Maria's room.

Seeing this, Padre Felipe smiled and answered the unspoken question.

"What power that old woman may possess," he said, "I do not know. But unfortunately there can be no question of her desire to bring all possible evil upon the man whom she blames for the death of her son."

"Benito Manaláng?" asked Lois though she knew what the answer would be.

"Benito Manaláng," nodded the priest. "One can understand that poor Maria is fairly crazed with grief.

"Yet never, senora, have I known hatred such as hers. She prayed, there in the plaza, with an earnestness even more horrible than her words. She prayed to Satan, begging him to take her soul on the one condition that she might see the soul of Benito Manaláng writhing in eternal torment.

"Then she — she, supposedly a Christian—invoked the ancient devil-gods of her race, swore by them that Benito, so that he might the sooner be damned through eternity, should die before dawn the death he has earned!"

" 'The death he has earned!' " repeated Lois, her eyes widening with horror. "Is it true, then, that there was a plot, and that Mariano was innocent? Padre, for heaven's sake tell us what we *are* to believe!"

"That," he gently replied, "I must not do. There is this much, however, that I *can* say: the body of Mariano Ricafólt will rest in consecrated ground. It is that matter, indeed, which brought me here——"

"Padre!"

THE CALL came from without. Padre Felipe went to the window, received a message delivered in the local vernacular, and then faced back into the room.

"It is a demand for my presence," he explained, "brought by a neighbor who was hailed in passing by Benito Manaláng, and who saw my pony tethered before your door. Don Jaime, I came to obtain your permission to remove the body of Mariano Ricafólt as soon as the time required by law for it to remain on the scaffold has expired. Three hours, is it not?"

"Three hours," assented Jimmy and then, glancing at the watch strapped to his wrist, he added, "there's an hour and twenty minutes left. I'll write the permit now, Padre, and——"

"I can't wait," returned the priest. "and I think there's no need. I'll tell the sergeant of the police guards that you have given leave, and——"

His words could no longer be distinguished. He clattered down the steps and was gone.

"Can he do it—get what he wants without a written order?" asked Lois anxiously.

"I rather think so," nodded her husband. "The sergeant of that police guard will be too darned glad to get rid of his present job to insist overmuch on frills and formality. I'll make sure, though, that the padre has no trouble."

"But not now," she begged. "Don't leave me yet—Jimmy—please."

"All right," he said, "I won't."

At this she began to cry. Picking her up, Jimmy carried her into their bedroom. With more zeal than skill

he peeled off her outer clothing, which performance caused a laugh with a note in it that was very like hysteria.

So he gave her a little shake and laid her on the bed, and upon his promising to look after old Maria, she consented to lie down for a little, and clung to his hand as he sat by her side.

He felt her grip on his hand relax, and when he bent over so that his ear was close to her lips, the deep and regular breathing told him that she was fast asleep.

RISING, he tiptoed out of the bedroom and softly closing the door behind him, stood for a moment at a window.

Night had gathered in long before. A waning moon was hidden or revealed by black clouds that flew before a wind that was now blowing a gale. The pale, intermittent light seemed somehow to lend an air of unreality to the familiar landscape.

He lighted a cigarette. The match, flaring up, showed the dial of his watch. Past the hour when that poor devil's body might be taken down, by gum!

Padre Felipe had attended to the matter, probably. But he might have been detained, and it really was his, Jimmy's, business to make sure.

Besides, there was his horse to take back to the stables at the rear of the Government House. No servants to send now; he'd forgotten that.

He kindled the wick of a kerosene lamp and peeped into the bedroom. Lois still slept, and the sight of her unconscious face reminded him of the promise he had made. So he went to Maria's room.

The idiot's snores met his ears before he reached it. The lamp revealed the old woman's white-draped form still huddled in the corner from which it had not stirred.

But the lips weren't muttering now. Motionless as the body, they were stretched in a ghastly, mirthless grin, which showed a single fanglike tooth.

He stooped and took one skinny wrist in his fingers. There might be a flutter of pulse there—or there might not. He couldn't be sure; it was very faint if it existed at all.

Was she dead or alive? Jimmy couldn't tell. But if what he saw wasn't death, it was a catalepsy or trance or coma or something like that—beyond his power, and beyond that of Lois to cope with. But Padre Felipe would know what to do.

Hastily making sure for the second time that Lois was still asleep, Jimmy set the lamp on a table, ran down the steps, mounted and rode out of the compound. The gates slammed shut. His horse, stableward bound, snatched at his bit and leaped forward.

THE GALE was behind him. Bits of wind-driven débris overtook them and passed—ghost-like at times, at other times invisible—as they flitted down the deserted street. They were invisible as a final turn, leading to the plaza, was approached. When horse and rider rounded that turn, the moon slid out from behind a ragged cloud.

The first light that filtered through revealed the scaffold and its chair, grim and forbidding but empty now. So Mariano's body had been duly removed. That was why the trampled plaza was also empty—but no, not quite empty.

There was a single figure, that of a man in dark, native-cut clothing, that came walking swiftly toward him. It might be the sexton—it came from the direction of the church—and if so, he would know where Padre Felipe could be found.

"Manuel!" called Jimmy. "Oh, Manuel, is it you?"

Making no sign of having heard, the figure tramped steadily on. Jimmy hailed again, with the same negative result.

There was something very queer about this. That fellow, whoever he might be, clearly wasn't the sexton. But that made no difference. Any native—or white man, either, for the matter of that—would normally answer in some way, especially when it was the Supervisor—*El Señor inspector*—who called.

The figure drew nearer and nearer still, but the light was very poor. Determined nevertheless, as he told himself, to get a look at this bird's map, Jimmy leaned down, far out of his saddle.

At that instant, with a squeal of terror, the horse made a cat-like, sidewise leap in the opposite direction. Caught unprepared, Jimmy was flung from his seat. He got a flashlight glimpse of a hideous face, black and distorted; then the ground met him.

He wasn't really hurt, however; only shaken. Struggling hard for breath, he raised himself on one elbow. He saw that the figure, still on its unswerving way, had reached the far side of the plaza. He couldn't overtake it now. Jimmy swore.

"THANK heaven, Don Jaime, that you still can speak!"

It was the voice of Padre Felipe. Those thanks, Jimmy thought as the priest helped him to his feet, might have been somewhat qualified if the padre understood English. But he didn't mention that.

"Who was — that — man who — scared my horse?" he panted.

"I did not see him," was the reply. "After leaving Benito Manaláng and attending to the removal of Mariano's body, I went to my own house, which I was leaving in order to revisit yours when your saddle-empty horse galloped by me on its way to the stables. Can you walk, Don Jaime? Try!"

Jimmy took a few experimental steps. His legs functioned in their accustomed manner, and the dizziness was passing from his head. So was his hat, which a mighty gust would have snatched away. But with a motion too swift to see, he caught it.

"It's the fringe of a typhoon, I suppose," said he, "but it feels as though the devil himself were on a rampage to-night. I'm all right, Padre; it's that old woman that's bothering me."

"Maria? What has she done?" asked the priest quickly.

"Nothing," answered Jimmy, wedging his hat back into place. "That's the trouble, and—listen! Do you hear it?"

THE PRIEST heard—could not help but hear. It was a scream that seemed fairly to pierce their ears, rising in shrill crescendo that soared like a rocket above the wind's many voices. Though inarticulate, it was laden with an agony of fear that no words could express. It ended suddenly, in a choking gurgle.

Before it had ended, Padre Felipe was running in the direction whence it came, his cassock streaming behind him as he skimmed over the ground like a sandpiper. Jimmy followed as best he could, but spurred riding-boots are not adapted for foot-racing, and his fall had affected him more than he had realized until then. So he lagged increasingly behind. But he labored doggedly on.

The padre disappeared into a street that opened from the far side of the plaza. A figure emerged from the end of that street so nearly at the same time that for a moment Jimmy thought that the priest had turned back. But in a moment more

he saw that this was not so. The moon was hidden just then. But nevertheless that purposeful stride was not to be mistaken; it was the man whom he had seen before, retracing his former path.

That path diverged slightly from the one that Jimmy now was following, and he made no attempt to correct this divergence. Padre Felipe, who must have met this creature face to face, would know who he was. Anyhow, it was a mere matter of curiosity.

He reached the near end of the street in time to see Padre Felipe turn a corner, which enabled him to follow without pause. Panting harder than ever, he stopped before a house with lighted windows at which the priest also had come to a stand.

Then he realized that since his leaving the plaza the wind had ceased. There was nothing very extraordinary in this; those circular storms were apt to end abruptly.

Yet this sudden calm seemed to him like an apprehensive hush, as though all nature dreaded some impending evil. This, he surmised, was because the sense of impending evil rose so strongly within himself as he recognized the house as that of Benito Manaláng. The fact that Benito lived in this locality had slipped his mind until then.

THE HOUSE, though raised on stilts like all others, was on a level with the muddy causeway of a road, with which it was connected by a horizontal platform. Both men listened; the stillness was unbroken by any sound from that house.

With Jimmy close behind him, Padre Felipe crossed the platform and knocked. The door opened as it was struck by his knuckles. Jimmy, all his senses keyed to their limit of alertness, pointed to the staple of a heavy inner bolt which had been torn away from the hard wood of the jamb to which it had been screwed. Padre Felipe nodded gravely and hurried in.

Kerosene lamps burned everywhere. An inner door, one panel shattered by a blow and its fastenings broken, swung ajar. It opened into a large bedroom.

There on the cane-bottomed bed lay the thing that once had been Benito Manaláng.

Jimmy knew it was Benito. This was Benito's house and, besides, there was the shock of iron-gray hair which had added so much to his plausible, rather imposing personality. Without those clues it would have been unbelievable.

The glazing eyes almost popped from a face more grotesquely horrible than a Japanese devil-mask. Over one cheek lolled that plausible tongue, blackened and swollen. The twisted limbs told as no words could have told of the agony through which they had passed; the well-kept hands were hooked into claws that had caught nothing.

It was murder—of course! The most horrible murder by far, but not the first by many, that had been brought to Jimmy's personal attention. His sharpened wits sprang automatically to work.

Access to the house had been easy. No servant would have dared for an instant to linger in that establishment after hearing the witch's curse, and Benito had no wife. Any noise would have served only to cause frightened neighbors to huddle more closely under cover. And there was that figure, seen coming and going, which would answer no hails. That idiot, old Maria's factotum was deaf and dumb!

All this passed through Jimmy's brain in a second or two while he stood in silence, watching the priest. Around the dead man's neck was a

piece of twisted cloth which Padre Felipe unwound and straightened. It was a black cap like the one that had been drawn over Mariano's face, there on the scaffold.

"You can't buy those things," cried Jimmy. "Somebody made it and left it here purposely. We both passed the man who must have done it. Do you know who he was, Padre?"

"I fear," gravely answered the priest, "that I do."

"That idiot?"

"No."

"Can you find him?"

"I think I can. I'm afraid that I can. Come!"

HE HAD drawn a sheet over Benito's body. Now he left the house closing its doors behind them. He led the way swiftly and silently, recrossing the plaza, passing the front of the church and coming to a halt by a little outbuilding that jutted from one of its transepts.

Then, for the first time, his meaning flashed upon the American's mind.

"The dead-house!" cried Jimmy. "Great heavens, Padre! Are you asking me to believe that a man with a broken neck could——"

"Wait," interrupted the priest.

He opened the door and scratching a match held it to the wick of a candle-stump which stood on a ledge of the rough masonry, just within. Its feeble light revealed the motionless, black-clad form of Mariano Ricafólt, lying on two boards supported by trestles, its distorted features dark with coagulated blood.

The priest pointed to the feet; they were thickly stained with undried mud.

"The spirit of a vengeful mother," he said, "in the body of her dead son."

"Padre," responded Jimmy, as he turned away, "I'll catch the real assassin inside of a week—just to show you what wild ideas you have. Good night."

He spoke confidently. He felt that he had to—that lifelong beliefs of his, never before seriously questioned, were on trial.

Again and again, as he hurried homeward, he told himself how strange it was that an educated man like Padre Felipe could believe such fantastic stuff—in the face of a perfectly rational explanation, too! For, of course, that idiot was the one who had done the actual deed. Who else could it be?

"Alto! Quien va?"

It was the sentry outside his gate. Jimmy identified himself, passed within and the gate was rebarred behind him. He glanced at the other sentries, pacing their beats with loaded guns—at the compound walls, six yards high, and thickly set atop with broken glass.

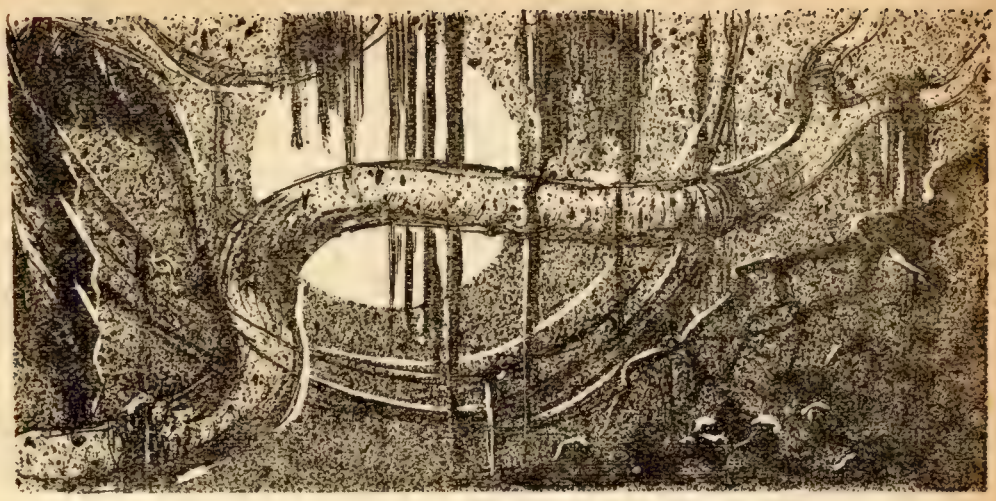
Mounting the steps, he went to the door of Maria's room and lighted a match. Its light showed the old woman lying on the cot which had been prepared for her, fast asleep. The idiot still snored in his corner. The match went out.

How could that snoring imbecile have left and reentered the compound. Or could it be true that he never had left it? Who was the creature whom Jimmy had met, there on the plaza?

But the answer never came.

The execution of Mariano Ricafólt is a matter of record in Lingayén, in Manila and presumably in Washington, for all who are interested to see. His innocence is not included in those records. But that can be proved by thousands still living who knew of it at the time.

The manner in which that execution was avenged is here written as fiction, in order that proof may not be asked.



Hyacinths

By HAYNES TRÉBOR

THE AGED steamboat plowed its way laboriously up the stream, her exhausts wheezing mournful, panting protest under an extra head of steam. The blunt old bow pushed aside the almost impenetrable mass of water hyacinths like an elderly, fastidious gentleman brushing aside waste paper from the path of his immaculate feet.

The hyacinths stretched unbroken up the stream, dull glossy green in color, sprinkled with waxy lavender flowers. From the upper deck one probably would have been tempted to refer to it as a thick, soft carpet of rich pattern laid in a winding aisle of the swamp; a carpet that the fretting steamboat was industriously trying to rip up.

The great pounding stern wheel lashed the plants with stolid fury and they whirled rakishly in the foaming wake; but a hundred yards behind the boat the carpet was as tightly woven as ever. Making any sort of a channel through that mass was impossible.

Captain Joe expected the time to come when even his old steamboat would no longer be able to plow through the water plants.

Joe was one of the traditions of the rivers. His eyes were mellowed by years of watching the twists and bends of the streams from the window of his boat; his cheeks were wrinkled from the serene intimacy and friendliness with the scenes. And his lips were slightly drooped at the corners from judiciously suppressed smiles over the beloved contrariness and stubborness of the tow boat; and perhaps, too, from a quaint, naive philosophizing.

To Joe the hyacinths were a sym-

bol. In a way they were the basis of his crude but keen philosophy. He always compared the little lavender blooms and the odorous roots. But he never hated them. For Joe had seen one of the rare, beautiful things that has come out of the swamp.

He remembered that once the hyacinths had been kind; or was it that those people had been able to tear away from their souls the inexorable fist of the treacherous monster?

YOU SEE, the day when the doctor first went into the swamp he stood on the deck of the old steamer. He was a young man, not long at his work, but eager and enthusiastic. He told Joe what he was to do in the swamps along Bayou Chico and the pilot listened to him with quiet interest.

"That's all very well," he said finally. "All very well, gittin' rid o' them mosquitoes. I reckin' it would be a relief to stand on the *Mary's* deck of a night without a herd o' them infernal animals buzzin' round ye an' gnawing at ye like wildcats on a fresh killed lamb. Yep, I reckin it would be a relief.

"But 'tain't mosquitoes what needs to be got rid of. They bring fever, like ye say, but what them poor devils here in the swamp needs is to git rid o' them hyacinths."

"Oh, that isn't anything to worry about. I rather like the looks of it, with those tiny flowers. Anyway, the engineers will find a way to get it out," the doctor answered.

But Joe shook his head pessimistically.

"Nope. They've tried poison an' cuttin' an' about everything else. Clear the streams twice a year an' spray poison, an' in three months it's twice as bad as before. It's awfully hard to git rid o' hyacinths," he said.

The other smiled. "Your worries are a navigator's, captain. Keeping the streams clear is necessary for your business. My interest is to stamp out disease."

"I wasn't thinkin' so much just o' them green plants ye see there," the pilot said. "They just represent something. The way they choke everything they git their hands on, the way they'd choke a man. It's that. The way things are choked up here in the swamp. I wasn't thinkin' so much o' the plants . . ."

The bell in the engine room jingled. "Here's Marguin's Landin'," the captain of the *Mary B.* went on. He extended his hand to the young man. "I'm glad I had your company comin' up. Like to talk now an' then. Ye'll find Tony Ferrin at the Landin'; he's got a launch an' goes up Bayou Chico. He'll run ye up to the settlement."

"Thank you, captain," the doctor returned. "I hope to see you when I come back this way."

"Ye will," was the answer. "An' if I can ever help ye eny in your work, me an' the *Mary* like to be accommodatin'. I wish ye luck, too, doctor. Goodby."

TOPPY LAVENE was drunk again. It had come to be practically an habitual state with Toppy.

Lavene was not a particularly large man; rather, he was stumpy, short-legged, long-armed and muscular. The narrowness of his neck lent effect to the peculiar disproportion of his head. From his face one could imagine he was the reincarnation of a lemur, even to the ghostly, sardonic glare in his eyes.

He owned the store in the little settlement on Bayou Chico—owned it and made his wife and daughter, Jane, take care of the operation of it. Toppy also had other interests, not exclusively confined to trapping.

The man leaning on the counter in the store glanced up at the clump of heavy shoes on the door step. The

expression on his face changed quickly . . .

LAVENE scowled angrily as he moved forward into the room. His flushed face twisted into a threatening sneer.

"Yu git out o' here, Tony," he said.

The other smiled quietly. His broad shoulders shrugged impassively.

"Yu orderin' me out o' yer place, Toppy?"

He looked straight into the eyes of the older man.

Toppy disregarded him but as he lurched over the counter his hand caught the hair of the girl.

He jerked her head back and forth roughly and finally half dragged her over the counter. Despite the pain the girl did not cry out.

When Lavene pushed her away and her body fell against the sharp-edged shelves, her lips, slightly pale at the corners, trembled only for an instant; then her eyes dropped.

The eyes of the woman who came beside her and put her arm awkwardly about the girl were burning with fierce hatred.

"Let her alone, Toppy," she said.

The man's lip curled. "Yu quit talkin' with Tony Ferrin, d'yu hear me!"

He shook his fist in the girl's face.

Tony stepped before him, his figure drawn up menacingly. "Yu look out, Toppy."

Tony's voice was low and uneven. He swallowed before going on.

"Yu look out," he repeated. "I'm goin' to talk with Jane whenever I please."

"Yeah?" Toppy's footing was unsteady. "Well, if I ketch yu in my store ag'in I'll run a knife through yer belly."

Strong, blunt fingers, slightly clenched, approached Toppy's throat. "I carry a pretty big knife myself, Toppy," Ferrin said. "Me an' yu ain't got no love fer each other, an' I ain't afraid o' yu. But if I hear o' yu treatin' Jane like th' way you did th' time yu—yu—when yu made thet scar on her cheek with a light-'ood knot—I'll—I'll——"

Lavene's eyes narrowed sharply, savagely. "Maybe you'd like a tip to them state police thet yu ain't carryin' jus' skins an' ordinary merchandise in thet launch o' yer's—there's plenty o' them hangin' around th' swamps lately.

"I jus' seen thet doctor—Ched Stoddard—I don't see him hangin' no signs out 'er visitin' no sick folks. Suppose he'd like t' know who's runnin' two hundred cases o' shinny an' smuggled rum int' Mobile ev'ry week, an' who owns thet still Ben Price runs?"

THERE was a dull, crunching thwack when the fist of Tony Ferrin crashed against the mouth of Toppy Lavene. Toppy went down and for a moment the other man hovered above his prostrate form. Then, abruptly, Tony turned and was gone.

When he got up Lavene turned his oathful wrath upon the two women. The girl eventually fled in terror, but the older woman stood her ground against her husband.

She was a withered creature with hollow eyes and parched skin. Yet in the tired depths of those eyes lurked a stubborn defiance, a bitter hatred for all those circumstances which had warped and bruised her spirit and trampled her life.

"I've stood purty near all I'm goin' to frum yu, Toppy Lavene," she cried passionately. "I ain't strong enough to stand much more o' yer meanness, an' I ain't goin' t' do it."

A red, bony hand caught Toppy's sleeve and held him back for a moment while the woman faced him.

"An' yu let Jane alone 'bout Tony Ferrin. He's th' only decent man in

this place an' yu ain't goin' t' stop her frum seein' him ef she wants t'."

ONE hesitates to say plainly that a girl like Jane Lavene is pretty. In the first place such a statement embraces the whole matter of standards. Yet one would be indisputably safe in declaring that for a creature of her environment the girl possessed unusual attractiveness.

Her supple body had the stiff grace of a young cypress. Had she known, a tiny yellow jasmine from the cool shadows of the swamp stuck carelessly into her hair would have performed almost unbelievable miracles.

The young doctor glanced at her frequently as he dressed the wound on her mother's arm and applied the bandage. She stood beside him, wide eyed, curious, watching his deft fingers at their task. When he asked for warm water and she went to the kitchen to get it, his eyes unconsciously followed her.

Doctor Ched Stoddard had noticed the Lavene girl once or twice as he went about his work during the five days he had been in the village. He had from the first been struck by some subtle charm that hovered about the girl.

He gave his attention to the wound. "How did you get such a nasty gash on your arm?" he asked Mrs. Lavene.

The woman's eyes avoided his nervously. "I—oh—I—I fell down an'—an' hit my arm," she said falteringly.

The young man nodded sympathetically.

"Too bad," he said. "But we'll fix it up and in a couple of days it will be all right again."

He closed his satchel and rose. "You'd better not try to use that arm too much, Mrs. Lavene, until it has healed a bit."

"All right." She hesitated, doubtful. "How—how much are yu goin' t' charge me, doctor?"

He laughed. "I won't charge you anything. I'm glad I happened to drop into the store; that cut should have been dressed yesterday."

"Ain't yu goin' t' be th' doctor here?" the woman inquired. "There's been right smart o' ailin's an' ain't never been a doctor what comes here reg'lar."

"No, I'm not going to stay here," he responded.

"I heard thet th' fever's been pretty bad."

"I know. There hasn't been any here yet; only up along Bayou Nigger. You see, I'm not a general practitioner. I'm only here doing special work. I'm employed by the state."

He glanced up to see the startled, frightened look upon the girl's white face.

CHED STODDARD saw Jane Lavene the next day when he stopped in the store. The following day he met her in the village and asked permission to walk home with her. After bidding her goodby he walked thoughtfully toward the house where he had his quarters.

Soberly he strolled through the gathering night. The vociferous crickets were twittering at him from the damp weeds. Suddenly the young man raised his head and laughed, boyishly and with amusement.

"Idiot!" he murmured. "It's about time you were getting back to the city."

He walked on for a few moments. "Well, Captain Joe will be passing the mouth of the bayou next Tuesday on his way down the Little Dog to Mobile. I'll make his boat," the young man said and strode on.

A figure emerged from the darkness and approached the doctor.

"Why, hello, Tony," the doctor said pleasantly. "How are you this evening?"

A sound that may have been a low growl was his immediate answer.

"Hello," was the low response finally.

"Going my way?"

Ferrin fell in beside the doctor and they walked on. Stoddard sensed the tenseness of the other man. He turned to him wonderingly.

"You act a bit worried, Tony," he said kindly. "What's the trouble?"

His speech seemed to produce the flare. Ferrin's face was thrown close to the doctor's, the great fists dangling at his side were tightly clinched. Tony's breath came with effort.

"Yu see here, doctor," he said fiercely, "yu stay away from Jane Lavene. She's my woman an' I don't want nobody foolin' around her, d'yu hear?"

Stoddard stopped and looked at his companion in amazement.

"Why, I'm afraid I don't understand, Tony," he said.

"Yeah yu do. An' yu leave Jane alone, or I'll make it the worse fer yu around here. Yu keep away from her."

For a moment he stood there in the street, quite still, glaring at the doctor. Then suddenly, without another word, he hastened in the opposite direction.

THE MOSQUITOES came up in ragged regimental formation, making noisy attack. They swarmed about the two people sitting on the bayou's edge, withdrew to count their losses and rally their forces, and then charged again.

The man and girl slapped their bodies with short pine branches, but beyond that brisk effort they seemed not to mind the persistent droning of the mosquitoes' warfare. The man paused in his fanning and laid a thick, heavy hand on the girl's.

"Listen, Jane," he said brusquely. "Me an' yu ought t' git married. I got enough money t' support yu."

A smear of blood showed on the girl's bare leg where her finger had crushed a fattening mosquito. She scratched the spot briefly and then turned to the man.

"We can't git married, Tony," she said. "Toppy'd kill us. Yu know how he hates yu."

"I ain't afraid o' Toppy."

"Yeah, but we can't do it."

"Sure we can. Yer maw likes me an' she sez yu ought t' marry me."

The girl was silent. The mosquitoes swept by like a cavalry troop in mass formation, struck and clattered on in the distance.

Clumps of hyacinths were drifting by on the black waters of the bayou. Their little stalks of purple flowers stood erect and quivering in a faint breeze. The dull odor of rotting mud penetrated the air.

"I'll bring thet priest feller from down at Marguin's Landin' up here when I make a trip in my launch an' git him t' marry us," Tony went on, leaning earnestly toward the girl. "We'll wait until some time when Toppy'll be away over on Bayou Nigger or up to th' Big Dog an' he won't know anythin' about it."

"But he'll be sore when he gits back, Tony."

"He won't do nuthin'. Come on, will yu, Jane?"

She scratched a new mosquito bite. "I don't know," she answered.

Then quite suddenly: "Why does Toppy hate yu so?"

Ferrin watched the floating hyacinths for a moment. "Well, I reckin Toppy thinks I know too much about his bizness," he told her.

"Toppy's bootleggin' an' makin' shinny, ain't he, Tony?"

"Yeah, I reckin he is, honey."

"What'd he mean th' other day when he said 'bout tellin' on yu? Yu

ain't doin' nuthin' like thet, are yu?"

The pine branch twitched uneasily. "I ain't doin' nuthin' like Toppy's doin', Jane," he said.

"Toppy's helpin' some fellers run dope int' Mobile besides. Thet's why he hates me. He's afraid I'll tell somebody 'bout thet. An' then he's sore because I been carryin' likker in my launch an' hurtin' his bizness, 'cause he has t' take all his stuff down in a skiff."

The girl grasped his arm anxiously. "If—if th' state police, or th' sheriff, or them prohibition men found out, Tony—what'd they do? To yu?" the girl asked tremulously.

"They'd take my launch away from me, an' maybe send me t' jail for a spell if they could prove anything," he answered. "But there ain't no danger o' thet. Them fellers what I haul fer watch out fer th' police an' fix things so I won't be bothered."

She seemed still not satisfied.

"Yu quit worritin' 'bout me," Tony went on.

Then he smiled and quickly, roughly caught the girl into his arms, pressing her tightly to him and showering kisses on her lips and cheeks.

"Yu do care 'bout me, don't yu, Jane?" he whispered excitedly. "Yu do love me."

She struggled breathlessly, futilely.

"Let me go, Tony," she pleaded.

He resisted her struggles and held her tighter.

"I care a lot about yu, Jane. Yu're goin' t' marry me," he told her.

The girl's muscles relaxed; her breath came in soft, quick sobs. Her warm, yielding body clung to his and her lips were the man's.

"I don't mind, Tony," she said.

Suddenly the girl pushed away from the man.

"Thet doctor——" she said.

The man released her and sprang sharply to his feet. Anger spread over his face. His hands gripped her shoulders.

"Don't let me ketch yu with thet doctor feller," he said threateningly. "Yu don't even have t' mention him . . ."

AN AFTERNOON some time later Doctor Ched Stoddard entered Lavene's store. He found Jane there alone, tending the store. Her mother, she informed the doctor, had gone visiting.

"I came to see if you can help me find Tony. I want him to run me up to the mouth of the bayou so I can catch Joe Pose's boat when he goes down tomorrow afternoon," the doctor explained.

"Tony ain't been around," the girl told him. "He went off yesterday t' make a trip with his boat an' he ain't got back yet."

"When do you expect him back?"

"He said he'd be back this mornin'. I'll tell him yu want t' see him when he comes," the girl offered.

"Thank you, Jane," he said. "Ask him to let me know if he can start in the morning. I don't want to miss Captain Joe."

Jane nodded. "I'll tell him." A pause. "Yu goin' t' leave, doctor?"

"Yes, I'm going back to the city. I've finished my work down here."

"Yeah. An' yu ain't comin' back any more?" She was watching his face earnestly.

"I don't think so. I've got all the information I need. But I may drop down some time to see you, Jane. You've been very nice."

She disregarded the compliment. "What yu been doin' here in th' swamp?" she asked.

"Why," he responded, "I've been on a health survey for the state. There have been a few cases of yel-

low fever and I was sent down to investigate."

The girl's lips trembled. "Then," relieved, "yu're a sure-enough doctor. Yu ain't no police, or deputy?"

Ched Stoddard laughed. "Of course not, Jane. Where did you get that idea?"

He put his hands on her shoulders as she turned away in embarrassment. "Never mind. I'm sorry I alarmed you."

She managed to smile at him tremulously. "All right. I'll tell Tony yu want him t' take yu down t' Little Tom."

"When I get back to Mobile I'm going to buy you a lovely new dress and something else nice for you, and send it by Captain Joe for your wedding present. Your mother told me yesterday about it. I'm glad, too, Jane, and I hope you'll be very happy with Tony."

Jane's eyes lighted eagerly and she returned the warm pressure of his fingers when he took her hands in his. As he looked at her, the doctor's face sobered for an instant.

Her hand was warm in his, her eyes shone alluringly, her half-parted, excited lips thrilled him. The blood surging into his brain blinded him.

"Yu're—yu're—nice," she said.

In a mad flash he swept her into his arms and kissed her. Quite suddenly he regained his senses. His lips tightened. Brusquely he pressed the girl's arms.

"Goodby, Jane. Tell Tony about the boat, will you please?"

He was gone. Flushed, trembling, she stared at him until something prompted her to turn hastily. Tony was coming into the store by the back door. His face was menacing.

THE MOSQUITOES were so bad at the mouth of the bayou that Tony drove the launch upstream to Marguin's Landing, about a mile's distance from the bayou, and left the doctor there. Captain Joe's boat would be coming downstream . . .

The doctor was a trifle puzzled over Tony's attitude during the journey. The man had been sullen and not prone to talk, answering Ched's pleasant chatting with growls and savage grunts. He sat at the wheel of the boat, glaring ahead of him.

When the doctor stepped ashore at Marguin's he did not return his farewell, but in silence turned the launch downstream and departed. Stoddard shook his head wonderingly.

"Must be a toothache," he mused.

THERE was a new moon but its meagre light was negligible. The *Mary B.* was unable to boast of electric lights. The old boat seemed hardly awake as she forged against the ever thickening mass of hyacinths.

The mind of the young man who paced back and forth on the lower deck of the vessel was deeply perturbed. He enjoyed complete solitude.

The negro firer, after stoking the furnace full of pine slabs, crawled upon the fuel pile and went to sleep. The engineer amid his hissing machinery spread greasy cards on a box and drowsed over them. The doctor did not feel like joining him.

Ched Stoddard was thinking and his thinking troubled him.

He thought of the city; and he thought of the girl back on the bayou. He wiped his brow uneasily, guiltily, when he remembered his feelings toward her. He wondered how unfair and indiscreet his actions the day before had been.

The memory of her body in his embrace set his blood pounding

again. He knew that any idea of love for her was rash, mad even. His pacing went on.

The figure of a man materialized from the gloom on the steamboat's deck. Warned by a premonition the doctor tried to ward off the charge. But in an instant he was grappling with the muscular form. Strangling arms were about him.

A short scuffle, insufficient to arouse the sleeping firer. The hyacinths caught the body as it fell, and muffled the splash. Fingers tried desperately to clutch the edge of the deck but a coarse boot kicked them off.

IN the morning Doctor Stoddard was found. His body had been caught in the tangled mass of hyacinth and this had kept him afloat, with his head above the surface.

He was dragged from the river, unconscious but living. One of the paddles on the *Mary B.'s* powerful wheel had struck him squarely on his shoulders and had mangled them.

TONY came back home the next day, silent, restless, with downcast eyes. His hands were never still. He jumped nervously without cause. He was unable to eat.

He came into Lavene's store, but he said little to Jane. Instead he paced the floor.

Jane watched him without comment. Yet her silence, her slightest glance at him drove him nearly frantic. Finally the woman faced him.

"Why did yu kill Toppy?" she demanded.

He recoiled in fright and was unable to speak for an instant. Then, "What d'yu mean?" he cried.

"I said, why'd yu kill Toppy?" the girl repeated.

"Kill Toppy? I ain't killed nobody."

Her eyes regarded him through narrowed lids. "Why yu actin' so nervous then?"

"I—I ain't feelin' so well," was the answer.

His lips were dry. He swallowed with effort.

"Yu was a long time gittin' back frum takin' th' doctor to th' river."

"I ain't done nuthin'. Who said Toppy's been killed," he screamed.

"His body was found in th' bayou this mornin'."

"I swear I didn't kill him," he said. "If yu say I did I'll—I'll—" His clenched fists were raised above her.

"Then I know yu did, Tony. Yu did! Yu did kill him like yu threatened."

"I didn't, I tell yu!"

"Then where wuz yu last night?"

His form sagged weakly. His arm moved in a helpless gesture.

A hurt, haggard, half pitying look crossed Jane's face.

"Oh, Tony, why'd yu do it? I ain't goin' t' tell, but—but yu're—yu're a—murderer!"

"Don't yu say thet!" he cried.

"Yu are too. I can't live with yu now. I can't, cause I'll always think o' yu—and Toppy."

THE days passed. Word was sent to the deputy sheriff at Marguin's Landing when the apparent murder was two days old.

The deputy who came three days later saw little evidence to lead to detecting the culprit. The trail was cold and the swamp intricate and consuming. He did not feel the necessity of undertaking a tedious search since the case was not pushed.

Mrs. Lavene accepted her husband's death calmly, as if it were an act of a latent providence.

But Jane was convinced that Tony had committed the crime. Not be-

cause of any logical reasoning, but because the thought had occurred to her when she had scarcely recovered from his angered blows after he had come upon her the afternoon the doctor had been there. And he had been too nervous to explain his absence that night.

Something incomprehensible and vague crept into her mind, something that seemed to be pressing and choking—resentment and anger first, then doubt and suspicion. Her faith in the man was stifled; she convinced herself that she knew he had killed her father.

Then one day, after several months had gone, Mrs. Lavene declared that she was "ailin'." For two days she dragged herself about, groaning and complaining. She went to bed finally, with a raging fever. Her skin had become an unusual color. It was the first case of yellow fever in the little settlement.

JUST at this time the *Mary B.* was again coming up the river, impatiently tearing through the hyacinths that filled the stream below Marguin's Landing.

The young man who stood in the wheel house beside the captain had, almost since the boat had left the dock at Mobile, been staring silently into the distance. His elbows were propped on the wind breaker as he moodily contemplated the concealed river.

His eyes were deep set and thoughtful—the eyes of a man who has reached the solution of an intricate problem.

He was tall—at least, he had been tall; the distortion of his shoulders was not due merely to the way he leaned over. For when he stood erect the grotesqueness of the stoop was more evident. His shoulders were drawn up about his neck, one more than the other; the bones were hopelessly warped despite the skill of eminent surgeons.

When he spoke his voice was low, fairly indistinct at times, reflecting days of brooding.

"I used to think those hyacinths were beautiful," he said briefly.

Captain Joe nodded. "Yep. An' have ye changed your mind eny?"

For the moment the young man did not reply. Finally he turned to the skipper.

"I rather hate them," he said.

"I suppose most folks get to hate them eventually," Captain Joe responded. "I reckin they do."

"Maybe," the other answered. "Maybe, Joe. Yes. I've been thinking: those hyacinths *are* like things—and people.

"Some folks are choked just like these streams. The hyacinths look pretty with their flowers, but there's the mud. And once they get started there isn't any stopping them. Like hates and prejudices and suspicions—especially hate. Especially that."

The pilot glanced from the corner of his eye at his companion. He smoked quietly for a few moments, guiding his steamboat around a tricky bend.

"Them hyacinths was kind to you, doctor," he said. "They kept ye from drownin'."

"Yes, but if I had got caught under them I'd never have breathed fresh air again. They would have held me down forever. Funny that they should have taken a fancy to me."

A shudder passed over the doctor.

"Ye was lucky," Joe said.

The young man smiled bitterly.

"Yes," he said. "I suppose I was lucky."

There was a slight pause.

"Why did ye come back to the

bayou country, Ched?" Joe asked then. "I thought ye'd have a good place in the city."

The pause was longer. Captain Joe did not look at the other man, and Ched's face was turned away towards the winding course of the stream. The tip of his finger moved absently up and down the edge of the window sill. He caught his breath and turned slowly.

"I came back to kill Tony Ferrin," he said.

His voice faltered. "But—but I don't know, Joe. I don't know."

"It is awfully hard to clean them hyacinths out," the pilot of the aged steamboat said a moment later.

STODDARD arrived on a launch he had hired at Marguin's Landing. Instantly he sensed the tragedy that hung over the place. He went first to the store and there found Jane Lavene.

She, with a cry of joy and relief, ran and kissed him impulsively. Then suddenly she backed away. Her eyes, terrified, were upon his twisted shoulders.

"What's—what's th' matter with yur shoulders?" she said.

The doctor smiled and pressed her arms gently.

"Never mind that now," he said. "It was an accident. Tell me first—what's wrong here?"

"Maw's in bed with the fever."

He was conducted into the bedroom and his face became serious and concerned when he looked at the woman.

"Lige Tromble and Ike Haley's wife have got th' fever, too," the girl said, watching him expectantly.

"My God," he breathed.

HE WROTE a letter to the government health officers who were working in another section on the Little Tom River and sent it by the boatman who had brought him through the hyacinth strewn bayou to the settlement. It was a terse, officially worded, but frantic appeal for immediate aid.

The doctor set to work. But from the first he realized the hopelessness of his task.

On the second day after his arrival Mrs. Lavene died.

Stoddard attempted to isolate the patients but he was only partially successful.

Every hour the bent form of the pale, sad faced young man could be seen going through the settlement, from house to house. For almost every hour a new case developed.

The doctor's chief assistant was the girl. She was with him during many of the long, grim, hopeless fights. She hardly slept; she became pallid; but she kept at her task despite his urgings that she rest.

Often he felt her burning, wondering, tearful eyes upon those warped shoulders of his. At times he could feel that her hand had reached out, hesitant, trembling, to softly touch the bulging coat.

And many times it was with effort that Ched Stoddard kept himself from sweeping the girl into his arms and telling her how passionately he loved her.

Tony Ferrin had gone away in his launch as soon as he had heard of the return of the doctor. Several days had gone by, but he had not come back.

The bayou was now heavily clogged with hyacinths and it was thought that his launch had not been able to break through and reach home.

The tiny flowers were blooming on the green matting that covered the stream; and every day someone was buried in the black loam of the rap-

idly enlarging cemetery in the little village.

Then one morning the girl came to him, a mute appeal in her tired, sleepless eyes. Haggard, drooping, exhausted, she stood before him.

Stoddard caught her and peered anxiously into her face. He had daily looked for the girl to be stricken.

"Tony's—Tony's sick," she said, and her voice broke. She was sobbing in his arms.

Ferrin had appeared in the settlement, staggering in from the swamp, his body burning with the terrible fever.

Together Jane and the doctor went to where the man lay tossing upon his bed and began the long vigil. There was nothing else to do but wait, soothing the racked body, quieting his delirium.

TONY was awake and conscious. He lay still, his eyes staring about the room. Then they focused on the doctor and for a long time they held their steady gaze; the man was looking at the doctor's shoulders.

Pain showed in his face and his brows contracted. The eyes turned away for an instant and his dry, swollen lips parted.

"Doctor," he whispered, "tell her—tell Jane here how you got yer shoulders hurt."

The doctor cleared his throat huskily and the sound seemed to cut the sick man like a dull knife.

"I—it was an accident. I tripped over a coil of tow-line on Captain Joe's boat and fell overboard. One of the paddle blades on the wheel struck my shoulder," Ched Stoddard said.

Uttering a cry Jane came to him and her fingers were clutched tightly to his sleeve. Tony's eyes were closed and his drawn features had relaxed. A faint movement of his hand over the bed covering thanked the man who stood beside the bed.

Tony's lips were moving again. "Yu was with maw Lavene 'fore she died. She told yu. Tell Jane who killed Toppy." His voice went off into a stillness.

"Why—Mrs. Lavene said she killed Toppy."

Tony's voice broke in eagerly. "She killed him the night before I took yu t' meet Joe's boat," he said. "I was going down to my launch when I saw two people standin' on the bank of the bayou up there by thet big cypress tree.

"Toppy was dead drunk, an' he wuz actin' awfully nasty. Maw Lavene an' him wuz arguin'. I heard them an' waited in the shadows, watchin' them. Maw was sayin' things t' Toppy an' Toppy tried t' beat her. He kept hittin' at Maw with his fists.

"Then talkin' real loud, Maw picked up a piece of wood that wuz layin' on th' ground and struck Toppy on th' head with it. Toppy was right on the bank an' after she hit him Maw gave him a shove. He went int' th' water. Then Maw stood on th' bank and every time Toppy's head came up she'd push him under with that pole she had. She kept him under.

"There was a lot of hyacinths there an' finally Toppy's head didn't appear no more. Maw just stood there an' laughed and cried; finally I left."

The still room echoed his voice for a time. Then the sick man stirred again, and spoke.

"That's where I got th' idea—about—that's how I—I thought the hyacinths wouldn't let—they would keep—down—"

Tony's words became a delirious babble, confused, from a fever tor-

tured brain. For an instant consciousness returned and for an instant his hurriedly spoken sentences were distinguishable.

"Maw killed Toppy," he whispered. "Maw killed him—because he never married her an' he treated her so mean."

The doctor was about to lay a guarding hand on the man's lips, but he saw that there was no need. The girl was not listening anyway. She had brushed past Ched and sat on the bed, staring at the man there.

Terror, an innate fear of the incomprehensible, showed on her wan face. She spoke the man's name hesitantly. The swollen lips seemed to smile slightly. . . .

THE DOCTOR left the room and went outside into the fetid air. It was sticky, oppressive, hot, and full of the odors of mud and decaying hyacinths.

These smells sickened the doctor. They irritated his nerves until he wanted to scream. But most of all he wanted to rest, to lie on a cool bed and sleep.

Yet he felt that his presence as a physician gave those miserable creatures some comfort.

Comfort!

He smiled grimly.

THE DEATH of Tony seemed not to have made any impression on the girl. It was as if sensibility had been forced from her. She appeared dull, her face like an image in black mud dried and hardened by the merciless sun.

Youth, too, seemed to have vanished mysteriously. It was a woman, mature, experienced, with all of life crowded upon her, who caught the limp body of the doctor when he fell. It was a slightly hysterical woman who managed to get him into bed in the cheerless, not too clean room back of the Lavene store. Doctor Stoddard, too, was down with the fever.

For a time Jane was practically insane, moving about frantically in futile desperation. She sat beside Ched's bed and her hands tried to shake those broken shoulders. She cried to him, tried to make him awaken from the hideous jungle of his coma.

The only words that he spoke, unconnected, jerky syllables, seemed to be directed to the captain of a steamboat.

If a boat would come—if a steamboat could get through the hyacinths—if help would come. . . .

The woman became calmer. As though some faith in his broken words had been born in her, as though she imagined that they would be answered, somehow, she went down to the bank of the bayou and sat there to wait.

HOURS. And only the intense stillness of a swamp through an aisle of which ran a green rug with a pattern of lavender flowers.

The girl wanted to fling her own voice into the air, to cry out, to plead for that boat that the doctor thought would come, to urge it on, to help it fight its way through the hyacinths.

But the green carpet remained unbroken. The flowers stood still as though they were eavesdroppers listening to gossip with suppressed smiles and not wanting it to appear that they were listening.

Those flowers began to weigh upon Jane's mind. She gazed at them as if they were fascinating her. As if, perhaps, she might find in them an answer.

Jane's brain was functioning in a new way. She wondered; she wondered why those hyacinths were

there, why they should be there choking the bayou, keeping away that boat the doctor wanted.

For as long as she could remember Jane had seen those green plants in the bayou. She had seen them multiply, become more numerous each year.

She had reflected very little upon her life before. It was something inevitable.

She knew, of course, that beyond the swamp there was something. Captain Joe's steamboat went to some place. She had vague ideas, but they meant nothing to her.

It seemed right that Toppy should be mean, that she and her mother should suffer. Things in the swamp do suffer. One gets used to that.

And there had been Tony. She hadn't cared much about marrying him. Her mother had said he was the only decent man in the section. He had been no worse than her father; he had caused something to stir within her. When he had held her—just as when the doctor had held her—she had felt that she had wanted something and been satisfied.

Tony was dead. It didn't matter. Toppy was dead, too. And the doctor would die. The fever would kill him unless that boat could get through.

It was those hyacinths. Tony had said that Maw had killed Toppy. But she hadn't really. Those hyacinths had done it. They had choked him to death.

The thought crashed into her brain and persisted there. It startled her. She could not understand. Those hyacinths had clutched him in their roots and kept him under the black water.

She didn't want the doctor to die. She wanted him to live. He could talk to her, he could tell her why those hyacinths had such pretty flowers and choked people.

If only the doctor wouldn't die. If those things wouldn't choke him. They were choking him by keeping that boat away. The doctor wanted that boat. He had to have it to live; and she wanted him to live.

In that instant Jane Lavene hated those waxy, green plants. She wanted to tear them from the bayou, to fight them, to break open a path for that boat. Anything—anything to destroy them, to keep them from killing this man.

THEN—then, like the anxious voice of a guardian trying to call advice and warning while he impatiently brushes through intervening barriers to reach a child in danger, there came at that moment the far-away, mournful call of a steamboat whistle.

Jane paused, transfixed. She listened—and in a moment the sound came again; the low, trembling note vibrated softly through the trees.

Far down the bayou Captain Joe's old steamboat was pushing her way through the narrow, hyacinth-clogged bayou.

Jane began to sob. Tears came and fell down her cheeks. Suddenly she turned and fled. Fled to the house where lay the doctor.

Falling to her knees beside the bed, she buried her face into the pillow beside the man's.

"Captain Joe's steamboat is comin' up the bayou," she cried.

The hands of the doctor moved and found one of her own. Hot fingers pressed it gently.

Red Paint

By MADELEINE SHARPS BUCHANAN

A THREE PART STORY—PART II

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED:

The richly bedecked auction rooms of Samuel Boldinski *are usually quite crowded due to the magnetic personality of the attractive* Victor Lemont, *auctioneer.*

Through Lemont's instrumentality a guessing contest, which proves to be extremely popular and remunerative, is inaugurated. A prize of three thousand dollars is offered to the person who, on a dollar chance, guesses most closely the number of vari-colored glass beads in the fat green-and-gold vase.

John Hornby, *salesman in the book shop next-door, has become obsessed with the desire to win the money. He spends his evenings watching Lemont, waiting for the nightly appearance of the vase. And Blakely, the other book clerk, is grumblingly left in charge of the store.*

Finally Hornby can stand the suspense no longer. He feels that he must make absolutely sure that the prize will come to him, and none other.

He steals a similar vase, which he has accidentally seen, from the shop of a fair-haired girl and fills it with the same sort of beads, which he then counts.

The next morning he is frightened at the sight of the girl, who is visiting the book shop for the first time. He steals out the back door and into the rear room of Boldinski's store, where he furtively substitutes the girl's vase for the real one.

CHAPTER V

"ONE DOLLAR A TICKET, ONE TICKET A GUESS!"

IN HIS room that night, after supper, Hornby brought out the green-and-gold vase—old Boldinski's vase—and dumped its glittering contents in the middle of his sagging bed.

Dipping his hands in the beads, he pawed them eagerly in search of some odd thing Boldinski might have put into the vase; but he found nothing.

He had been right about the beads. They were just ordinary ones, of the kind with which he had filled the vase now in Boldinski's store. He could not have afforded to make a mistake about those beads.

Sam Boldinski or Lemont had probably bought them as he had, along the boardwalk, for Boldinski did not handle cheap beads of that type.

There was no time to count them then, for he had to get back to the book store. But he was not afraid to face the moment when Lemont would dip his long fingers into the gaping mouth of the vase and play with the

gleaming contents. There were no trick beads in this vase.

There Boldinski had slipped up. Cunning old fox, it had not occurred to him that a chap as smart as John Hornby might be next-door.

The vase in its hiding place again, Hornby plunged into his duties, which at no time were arduous, at the book store. But his brain seemed composed of handfuls of gleaming, tumbling beads and now and then he passed his fingers over his eyes.

LEMONT'S voice rose next-door. The dulcet, wheedling tones of it crept into the aristocratic confines of the little book store. It seemed to be pulling Hornby out by main strength. Yet he withstood it. He could not hang around that Boldinski store every night, no matter how powerful the urge. Nothing would happen tonight. He would stay away. It would be the same old performance over again. But he was secure now.

Mighty hard, though, to know what to do about replacing that vase. He hated an unfinished job, and in his first attempt at crime, too. It sure was the act of an amateur, a quitter, to throw that vase off the end of one of the piers. And yet—if the beads were all alike in both—why run the risk—why——

Again that sickening sensation attacked Mr. Hornby in the pit of his stomach. His eyes bulged from his head and he shook with a chill.

Blakely, reading at the back of the store, his feet on a shelf, did not notice him as he crept to the door and stood leaning there as though for a breath of air.

The girl from whom he had stolen the vase, her slight figure wrapped in a light summer cloak, had sauntered past the book store.

SHE WAS there again, and just as Lemont would be starting in with the green-and-gold vase! Was that accident, or design? Every tortured nerve in Mr. Hornby screamed that it was design.

Never before had that tormenting young woman been seen in the neighborhood of his book store, and now here she was—twice in one day—right after he had stolen the vase from her cheap little shop!

His body seeming to be rooted to the spot, Hornby craned his neck after the girl and the worst seemed to happen when she paused, halted by Lemont's alluring tones, and stepped into Boldinski's store!

Great heavens! Lemont was handing the military brushes to the "good sport" who was not afraid to take a chance, and the turn of the green-and-gold vase came next! What had brought that girl away up there at that hour? Didn't she work?

No use. He simply could not stand the suspense. He must get into that crowd and watch the girl. He wanted to know what she went there for, how she behaved when she saw the vase Lemont would trot out, what was the big idea, anyhow!

WITHOUT a word to the engrossed Blakely, Hornby slid into the crowd that had gathered about the wide entrance to the Boldinski store.

It was not hard to locate the girl. That light head of hers was picked out easily enough in a bunch of people. She was standing close up to Lemont, her bright, pert face lifted to his, her ears apparently drinking in every word he said.

Near to her was the black-draped pedestal where, in another minute—well, here it came, carried carefully in Boldinski's fat hands, the vase Hornby had left with him that very morning, the vase that belonged to the girl!

"If any of you have been in here before," Lemont was beginning, "you

know all about this exquisite vase and the fortune it possibly holds for one of you. In a few days now this opportunity——"

But Hornby did not hear Lemont. His eyes were fastened on the girl, the fair-haired girl, whose rightful property that vase was. He fancied that he saw her start, and certainly she moved up a bit closer.

Lemont went on with his explanation.

"Come up and look at the vase," he was saying. "A dollar a ticket—a ticket a guess!"

Hornby was still staring at the girl. Of course she saw that the vase was just like one in the store in which she worked, or the store she owned.

There was the chance that she did not know anything about the vase on that lower dusty and forgotten shelf, but it was a thin chance. Watching her, Hornby saw that she knew, all right. Her hand lifted high in the air. The slim fingers held a dollar.

Great snakes, she was going to take a chance on that vase—the vase she possibly knew well! Was she a rival? Did she know to a bead the capacity of the vase?

After he had planned and sweated and robbed and risked everything, was this girl coming in to take the three thousand right from under his very nose?

HORNBY'S knees knocked slightly together. There was nothing to do if this girl knew the capacity of her own vase at home. But maybe she did not. Maybe the sight of Boldinski's vase brought to mind her own on that lower dusty shelf, and she planned to go home and fill it with beads, and count them! It would be a cinch then.

But if that was the case, Hornby was all right. Because that vase was no longer on that dirty bottom shelf in the cheap little store down the boardwalk! It stood in proud beauty right before her eyes on that black pedestal at Lemont's side!

Well, she had her red ticket. Lemont had given it to her with an ingratiating smile. She withdrew into the crowd, but her eyes were still on that vase.

Hornby was not afraid that she would see him. She was too intent upon the vase. She probably had that little trick up her sleeve, the happy thought of filling with beads her own vase at home. She was fancying that three thousand was hers.

Another woman pushed past Hornby. She was a plump, handsome creature, bareheaded, her shoulders covered by a fur wrap, stones that might or might not have been diamonds twinkling on her fingers.

Lemont's attractive voice lifted a bit higher.

"Come on! Place your dollars, folks! Three thousand for one! Some offer! Can you find a better investment?"

The handsome, plump woman waved at Lemont over the heads of the crowd. Her jeweled fingers, too, held a dollar bill.

"I want a ticket, please!"

Hornby did not pay much attention to Lemont or Boldinski then, but he did get a fleeting glimpse of the handsome, sensuous face of the bejeweled woman to whom Boldinski himself, with a low bow, handed the red ticket.

He was not interested in anyone but the girl. The three thousand lay between the girl and himself, he knew that. If the girl, even with the vase gone, knew how many beads it could hold, then the thing might be a tie.

But she could not know as well as Hornby, who guessed nothing about it, but had counted them! He knew

to a bead just how many were in that handsome green-and-gold vase standing there on the black pedestal, tantalizing everyone!

All those people would give a lot to know what he knew. It gave him a delighted feeling, too, to realize that Lemont, being an employee, could not compete. All Lemont, the slick bird, could do would be to hand him that three thousand dollars on Friday night!

But now the fair-haired girl, whom he could have sworn had never laid eyes on him since he had asked her for a flashlight, was in the thing with him. She thought she had a chance, or she would not have bought that red ticket with that queer little smile on her lips.

If she had not missed that vase, Hornby could understand that smile. But if she had missed it, it wasn't so good for Hornby. For that argued that the little lady had a fair idea of the capacity of the green-and-gold vase.

It was horribly upsetting, no matter how you looked at it, for this girl to butt in just after he had stolen her darned old vase.

A LITTLE shiver ran over Hornby as Lemont plunged his slim fingers into the vase and brought them out dripping with gleaming beads. It seemed as though anybody as smart as Lemont must guess the deception!

But no! The affair was going on as usual. Hornby could not find a hitch in it. Neither Lemont nor Boldinski knew that the vase there before them was not the same vase they had been showing the public for the past two weeks.

And the girl. She was going, worming her way politely through the crowd, that little smile still on her lips.

Well, let her go. She was either dangerous, or she was not. Hornby was just as willing she should not see him, whether she had missed the vase or not. But it was hard luck all right, if that girl knew, vase or no vase, how many beads the dog-gone thing would hold!

Why would she know that? His brain was running away with him. But that smug little smile she had worn from the moment when she first saw that vase until she had passed out of the store simply got Hornby.

And something about her worked on his nerves. She had asked him if a lantern would not do as well for him as a flashlight! A smart, sassy thing she was, a made-up little hussy.

He was not sorry he had stolen her vase. But she should never step up on Friday night and grab off that three thousand dollars from under his nose!

Hornby went wretchedly back to the book store, his overwrought imagination tormenting him with the possibility that the strange girl had crates of the blooming green-and-gold vases somewhere in that dirty little shop of hers!

In that case, he would have to back up with a truck to make his case secure!

ONE HORRIBLE thought remained, however, no product of his imagination, but a frank, torturing fact.

The strange girl whom he had robbed had bought a ticket and that insured her presence at the auction-rooms on Friday night when the three thousand dollars were handed out. She would see him, no matter what happened—she would certainly see him, and associate him with her stolen or lost vase, most especially if Lemont handed over to him the three thousand dollars for guessing how many beads it held!

Hornby groaned. He seemed to have gotten into a few complications.

All the while he counted the beads in the Boldinski vase that night, he saw the fair head of the girl he had robbed and who he fancied had trailed him, and the tantalizing smile she had worn when she took her red ticket from Lemont in the Boldinski store.

CHAPTER VI

THE HALF-COMPLETED JOB

HOW the next two days passed Hornby never afterward knew. He could not bring himself to throw away the vase he had brought from that back room at Boldinski's, and neither could he even begin to summon up nerve enough to steal back there and again change the vases.

He felt sure that he would never find the green and gold vase alone again and that he would be caught. Eaten up with disgust for himself, he yet hesitated about completing the crook trick he had tried.

The vase that Lemont would show on Friday night would be the one that belonged rightfully on that dusty lower shelf in the cheap little store further down the walk.

He did not see the girl again for the simple reason, perhaps, that he kept away from the opulent interior of the Boldinski store. Lemont's enticing voice reached him every evening and morning, luring into the auction rooms the strolling summer people. But it had no pull for Hornby.

If the girl went back, he did not know. He spent his time in the book store, the rear of it, watching the walk. Not once did that girl have a chance of walking in and catching him unaware.

LEMONT, too, occupied a goodly part of John Hornby's thoughts. Knowing Lemont as he did, through having studied him so long during those hours of silent envy when Lemont did his stuff from the rug-draped platform, it began to dawn upon Hornby that it was not like the man to have three thousand dollars under his fingers like that and never even have a chance at it.

But how could Lemont have a chance? He could not, of course, buy a ticket. And Hornby had a notion that sly old Boldinski would watch out that Lemont had no chance to count those beads.

It took some little time to count the beads, as none knew better than Hornby. Of various sizes, the majority rather large, there were exactly three thousand four hundred and sixty in the Boldinski vase, while the stolen vase which he had left at the store in its place contained three thousand four hundred and ten. He had managed in some way to get fifty less beads into the vase he had "fixed." That worried him, for if old Boldinsky really knew how many beads he had in the vase, the fact that he had missed count on fifty might rouse his suspicions.

Assuredly, Hornby should have had nerve enough to carry out the entire plot and return the Boldinski vase. But he did not have. No use contemplating that. Every night he got out the fat, glittering thing and set it in the centre of his bed and glared at it.

The girl would have had the cool nerve to do the thing up right. He could not have said what made him think that. But that girl meant to get that three thousand if she could.

And she had a decided idea that she could. Her pert, pretty face had said that to Hornby as she left the auction rooms with her red ticket. Yes, she would have the nerve. And that knowledge did not help his state of mind any. It began to make him angry just to look at the bulge un-

der his soiled linens in the closet that concealed the hiding-place of the vase. It was not safe there. He knew it.

He would never have any peace as long as it was there, and he had plenty of opportunity to take it out and lose it. But he refrained. He felt ashamed to. He had done the thing so brazenly, ever since he saw the green-and-gold vase on that dirty lower shelf in the girl's little shop. He had meant to replace Boldinski's own vase before the prize was given out.

All he had wanted was a chance to count the beads. That chance would never have come if he had not substituted the other vase so that Boldinski would not grow suspicious. And now—well, he had simply lost his nerve.

The very thought of that little dark room where the vase stood on the table, of the heavy draperies about the walls, of the agonizing time he had spent there waiting for a chance to change the vases, of the luck that had miraculously attended his venture, set him to trembling. Yes, he had too much sense to test his luck or his courage again. Let well enough alone.

He knew, none better, not even that fair-haired, sassy girl, that the vase in the Boldinski store contained exactly three thousand four hundred and ten beads!

And Hornby would take no chances. Three thousand four hundred and ten was what he would write on one ticket, and three thousand four hundred and nine on the other. A bead might fall out of the vase, who knew? He had two tickets, anyhow.

THREE thousand dollars! It was a young fortune. Hornby looked upon Blakely, the old frump, with pitying eyes. Spray City wouldn't see him for dust if he got his hands on that cash! And it had been simply impossible to be next door to Lemont's luring voice twice a day and not make a daring effort to win that money.

What was it to Boldinski? He was not robbing anyone. The fat old bird would never miss that.

And so the momentous Friday dawned and found the green-and-gold vase that belonged to Boldinski still buried under a growing heap of soiled linens in John Hornby's locked closet.

His chance had passed to carry out the plot as a clever crook, one with real nerve, would have carried it out, and yet he had not disposed of that second vase. It had to be done and he would have accomplished it long before had it not seemed so darn humiliating, so weak and so like a quitter!

And then, too, the girl's face with its smug little smile kept haunting him.

"I would have done the thing right," she seemed to say.

CHAPTER VII

THE WINNING TICKET

FRIDAY night found John Hornby very nearly a nervous wreck. He would not have felt so if it had not been for the thought of the girl whose vase he had stolen, the girl who had also bought a ticket.

He was absolutely sure he would win the money, but he shrank from taking it before the eyes of that girl. Would he have the nerve? Would not that quick brain of hers connect him with the disappearance of her vase? How much did she know by this time?

As the hour approached, Hornby went about the book store in a cold

sweat. Blakely's kidding fell on deaf ears.

Next door Lemont's silken voice was raised, pulling the old gag about the good sport and the mysterious package. But it would not take any clever stunt to fill the auction rooms that night. The crowd had started to gather early.

Hornby had written the winning number boldly enough on his red ticket and handed it in to Boldinski early that morning. Three thousand, four hundred and ten, the correct number to a bead. There could be no mistake. The money was his all right.

It was highly unlikely that anyone else would have the dumb luck to hit upon the exact number of beads in the vase. Lemont had said no one would guess the exact number. Well, he was taking no chances.

"Go ahead in," said Blakely at last, "and get your three thousand. I'll take care of the store."

Hornby paid no attention to his fellow worker's grin. He smoothed his hands over his hair and gave a glance at the mirror in the rear of the store.

With his knees shaking under him, he stepped into the crowded entrance of Boldinski's opulent auction rooms.

THE PLACE was crowded and Lemont stood upon the rug-draped platform, selling some exquisite glassware. He realized that his little stunts for gathering a crowd were not needed that night.

There was scarcely room for the people, and Mamie Cohen stood at the rear of the shop, her jaws working on a wad of chewing-gum, her dull eyes fixed admiringly upon Lemont. There was no room and no need for her to undulate about in the fur cloaks that night.

On the black-covered pedestal beside Lemont shimmered the green-and-gold vase, the vase Hornby had placed in the back room—the girl's vase!

John Hornby shivered when he saw it. Somehow he felt that he should have finished that job. He didn't like to be a quitter, even when he played a crook game.

And then, over the heads that were crowded into the auction rooms, Hornby saw the girl. And she was looking directly at him.

Her smiling eyes held him like those of a snake, and yet there was nothing repellant or snakelike about the young woman. She nodded at him pleasantly, and Hornby mechanically returned the nod.

Good glory, she *knew* him! Did she know her vase, placed there in bold enough view?

Hornby would have given almost anything at that moment if he could have known what number the girl had written on her red ticket.

The fact that she had seen him and recognized him was agony. Why had she remembered him? Surely there must be a good many people who dropped in at her shabby, cheap little shop.

Had she remembered him because she knew the vase had vanished after he had asked her for a flashlight—the vase that was there before them both? Hornby groaned.

Why did this girl have to cut across his clever stunt of getting three thousand dollars? Would he ever have the nerve to step up and take it from Lemont or Boldinski—with those mocking, searching eyes of that girl upon him? Would she follow him out of the store and demand an explanation or, perhaps, half the cash?

HORNBY knew little of the proceedings before the winning ticket was read. His brain was in a whirl,

and his eyes now and then furtively sought out the girl who had worked her way as close to the vase as she was permitted to get. Hornby felt sure she knew some little mark on the darn thing.

But at last a hush fell on the crowd and Lemont, with one strip of scarlet pasteboard in his well-manicured fingers, stepped to the edge of his rug-draped platform.

"I have to announce," he said in that smooth, silken voice of his, "that the three thousand dollars for guessing the correct number of beads in this bee-utiful vase goes to Lora Lawall. This lady, according to her ticket here, has guessed the exact correct number — which is three thousand, four hundred and thirteen beads. We congratulate Miss Lawall. Luck was with her. We have counted the beads—that is, Mr. Boldinski has, an hour ago, but we shall proceed to again count them before you all."

The handsomely furnished auction rooms whirled and danced before Hornby's sick eyes. Lora Lawall! Was that the girl?

No—the woman who pushed forward amid the applause to receive the bundle of cash from Boldinski's hand was the plump, handsome creature who had bought a ticket the night the girl had bought one. Hornby remembered her richly colored, sensuous face.

But what matter who got it? The thing was crooked. Three thousand, four hundred and thirteen beads in that vase that he had himself filled with three thousand, four hundred and *ten!*

It had been Lemont who had put in those extra three beads. But how had the woman known? Who was this woman?

Three little cheap beads, three bits of glass to stand between him and three thousand dollars—after he had stolen from that keen-eyed girl yonder——

Hornby turned to look at the girl, and met her gaze squarely. She was a bit white and her lips were set in a queer, determined line.

She had been as sure as he had been of winning that bunch of cash! Hornby saw that then. Her face showed it, but something there seemed to say that she was not beaten yet. Why did she look at him? Hornby felt sure that the girl had him right, that she knew his whole wretched part in the thing.

But three thousand four hundred and *thirteen* beads in that vase!

The woman was cramming the bank-notes into a huge beaded bag and laughing excitedly. Hornby, watching her, felt the urge to close his fingers about her plump neck and choke the life out of her.

Then his eyes lifted to Lemont who, with Boldinski, was counting the beads for everyone to see. People crowded close about them. But something like a curtain of light seemed to lift on Hornby's bewildered, angry brain.

LEMONT! Had he not thought once before that Lemont would never allow three thousand dollars to be that close to him and slip past his fingers? What had Lemont to do with that woman's guess, and the three extra beads in the vase that Hornby himself had filled?

There was nothing to it save that Lemont had found a chance to count the beads after Hornby had changed the vases. And to make sure that no one but himself and the woman, his accomplice, would know the exact number of beads in the vase, he had added three more at the last minute! And the woman had known, or Lemont himself had marked her ticket!

Unable to take a chance for the

cash himself, Lemont had used this woman to guess for him. That must be it. Hornby had never had a chance, nor had the girl whose vase stood there before them all on the black-draped pedestal. From the first the money had been Lemont's.

He might have known that Lemont was slick. Later he would divide the money with the woman, or take the major portion of it. Later—after the store was closed.

And suddenly, as Hornby watched the girl whose vase he had stolen work her way out of the crowd toward the boardwalk, a new surge of anger swept him. The girl had been cheated, too.

He would have given a lot to know what her guess had been. But he was sure that she knew, or felt that she knew, exactly the number of beads that her vase would hold.

Well, there was nothing for him to do save get rid of that old vase of Boldinski's that lay hidden in his closet. He certainly had been a fool to think that he could put one over on Lemont.

Night after night he had admired Lemont and his slick ways, his smooth manner. He might have known that the three thousand would find its way into Lemont's clever palm sooner or later.

There was nothing to make Hornby think Lemont knew the jeweled Lawall woman. But he knew, and the girl knew.

And suddenly Hornby made up his mind that he would make sure that his guess was right. Perhaps he could show up Lemont to Boldinski, or get even with him somehow.

Edging through the crowd until he stood near Lora Lawall, he heard the very thing he had made up his mind to find out.

A reporter was speaking to the woman and she was doing her best to get rid of him.

"I can't stop to talk now," she was saying impatiently. "If you wanta drop around tomorrow, I'll see you. I'm at the Evelyn."

Hornby let her pass him, and then he got out into the fresh air of the boardwalk. He drew in great gulps of it. The incense-filled atmosphere of the Boldinski auction rooms had choked him.

There was work for him to do that night. He had to get rid of that green-and-gold vase, and then he intended to know whether Lemont had met the woman or not and divided that three thousand dollars. He felt certain that that must be the way out of it, or else how had those extra beads gotten into the vase?

Lemont had put them there. It was a slick little stunt, all right, involving no risk whatever. At almost the last minute Lemont could have dropped those beads into the gaping mouth of the glittering vase. A movement of his clever hand, a mark on the woman's ticket and, presto, nobody but Lora Lawall had a chance!

The fair-haired girl whom Hornby had robbed had vanished in the crowd. In his eagerness to hear where the handsome, plump woman, who he felt sure was Lemont's accomplice, lived, Hornby had lost sight of the girl.

Well, she could not be sure now, anyhow, that he had stolen the vase or counted the beads or had anything to do with any of the rest of it!

They had both been done.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE BEACH

HORNBY did not return to the book store, for he felt that he was in no state of mind to meet Blakely's sneers. He walked about in the streets, cooling

his nerves and his heated brow, until he felt sure the Lawall woman must have returned to her hotel, where she probably meant to wait for Lemont.

The auction rooms did not close until midnight and Hornby knew that Lemont would be too smart to do anything out of the usual run of things. He would stay until closing-time, as he always stayed.

John Hornby's intention was to expose the two unless they gave him a goodly portion of the three thousand. He would find a way to expose them without involving himself too deeply.

He did not know yet how that was to be done, but to have Lemont snatch that money from under his eyes when he, Hornby, had stooped to commit the first criminal act of his life to get it, was too much. Coming on top of his hatred and envy of Lemont, that was too much.

Even if he had to divide with the woman, twenty-five hundred was a nice little wad.

IT WAS eleven-thirty when Hornby walked down Ocean Avenue and ascended the steps of the "Evelyn" Hotel. It was a medium-sized frame building. There were hundreds like it going up all over the growing seaside resort, all labeled: "Rates Moderate—Meals Good."

In the empty exchange a young clerk yawned behind the desk and read a western novel. He eyed Hornby with a total lack of interest.

"Is Miss Lora Lawall in yet?" asked Hornby.

"I haven't seen her come in," replied the young man wearily. "She went out early in the evening."

"Well, can you find out?"

"Sure. I can call her room."

"Well," said Hornby, "go to it."

But there was no result. No one in Miss Lawall's room answered the telephone.

"I told you. She didn't come in yet," said the clerk disgustedly.

Hornby's heart sank. He realized he had done a foolish thing not to have trailed the Lawall woman from the moment she left Boldinski's. Of course Lemont would not go to her hotel. He would meet her somewhere else, maybe down on the sand.

He wouldn't take any chances. He wouldn't want anyone to know that he knew her. And the woman would stay out until she had completed her transaction with Lemont. Until the money was divided.

The whole vase proposition had been Lemont's idea. One of his clever little ideas. Of course it had been! It had been fixed from the start!

Well, he had been a fool. Now, before he tried to get rid of the vase, he had better go after Lemont and stick by him. He had no chance of finding the woman.

"Do you know Miss Lawall well?" asked the clerk, staring curiously. "She's only been here a week."

"No, I was calling for a friend," said Hornby, rousing himself and turning away. "I'll drop in again."

LUCK seemed to be against John Hornby, however. When he reached the Boldinski store it was closed. The dim red lamps that burned all night inside the entrance seemed to mock him like laughing eyes. He had lost track of both Lemont and the woman. The only thing to do was to get the vase and destroy it.

He might find the woman at the hotel the next day if he got there before she fled. But it would have been a great piece of work to have walked in upon them when they were dividing the cash.

Back to his boarding house Hornby went, and up to his room. From

the closet he dragged that green-and-gold vase filled with beads.

A fine fool he had been! The idea of thinking he could have a chance! Lemont had taken no chances himself. Not knowing whether the vase had been tampered with or not, after it had been too late for anyone to try anything, and immediately before Boldinski had made his count of the beads, for it must have been then he had simply dropped three more into the vase.

A cinch. Quite simple. The only clever thing Lemont had done was to count those beads himself. For that he must have gone back to the store at night alone. Boldinski trusted him implicitly, for Lemont brought in big business.

Hornby was so angry he could have kicked himself for not having kept that handsome Lawall woman right under his eyes. That was all he need to have done. Just to have trailed her until she met Lemont.

Then to have walked in on them both. They would have paid him well to shut up. Ass that he had been!

With the heavy vase once more in the black bag, Hornby descended the stairs and stole out into the midnight streets.

With no hesitation he took the way to the ocean. That darn vase should be flung off the end of the pier. Then if it did come in some time, it could never be traced to John Hornby.

IT WAS a cloudy night and the waves came crashing in on the sand, foaming against the piles of the long pier Hornby was making for.

This was a long since disused structure that waves and storms had set to work to obliterate. But it offered a fine place to Hornby from which to fling the vase, if he crossed the sand to the beginning of the pier and then manage to make his way out on its shaky piles to the end. No one was likely to see him down there.

It was not pleasant, however, for it was chill on the sand and the sound of the waves affected him unpleasantly, while his shoes filled with the loose sand and made plunging along with the heavy vase anything but comfortable.

His whole soul furious with Lemont and that plump, handsome woman who had put out her ringed hand for the bundle of bank-notes old Boldinski had given her, Hornby felt the desire to fling that devilish vase as far from him as possible —and he had an unusual strength in his right arm.

He would get Lemont and the woman. They should not pull this stunt. They had defrauded the girl whose vase Boldinski had, as well as himself.

Then Hornby stopped as though shot. From behind him, from the direction of the boardwalk where the deep shadows clung, had come a choked scream.

It was a horrible scream, as though someone had cut it short with strangling fingers. It froze Hornby to the spot with sheer panic.

Somebody was being killed!

He had read plenty of stories about that sort of thing, but to encounter it right behind him, down there on that deserted beach with the waves crashing against the piles of the broken-down, old pier was something else again.

He could not go on. Yet he felt that he would rather die than turn and face what lingered there in the shadows of the boardwalk.

WHEN a crisis confronts us we discover things in ourselves that we never knew we possessed. Hornby now found that he was rather more of a man than he had figured and

that he did have a trifle more courage than he had imagined.

At any rate, he could not go on and dispose of that blamed old vase until he had seen what was doing back there under the boardwalk. Something kept telling him that it was a woman who had screamed.

Turning about, then, shivering and dragging his reluctant feet, Hornby plunged through the loose sand toward the spot where he had heard that choking sound.

There was nothing now. Only the crash of the waves and the sigh of the wind and the creaking of the piles about the old pier. Yet although he shook with fear of what he might stumble upon, Hornby went on.

It was dark under the boardwalk and Hornby moved cautiously. Once he brought up smack against a post on which a sign swayed and announced in great, red letters that Hornby made out when he bent close to it, "Wet Paint." His sleeve was damp.

Darn it! He had brushed against the stuff and he had on his best suit. He had rather dressed up for that auction that night, celebrating his winning the three thousand!

He grated his teeth and plunged on, noiselessly, his arm aching with the weight of the black bag.

And then he stumbled upon something. Drawing back with a gasp, Hornby saw that the something was a body—and the body of a woman.

He had been right. Murder had been done. And just that minute before, while he made his way out toward the disused old pier!

Stooping low, Hornby managed to strike a match and get a look at the body on the sand. Then he staggered back, the sputtering match falling from his nerveless hand.

The dead woman at his feet was Lora Lawall, and she had been stabbed. The knife was sticking out of her breast—he had seen it in that one lightning flash.

Lora Lawall, who had left the Boldinski store with three thousand dollars in her beaded bag! Plenty of people had seen her go. Had just a regular bandit followed and held her up?

But what was she doing down there on the sand under the walk, unless she had gone there to meet Lemont and divide the money?

Lemont! Had Lemont killed her?

And then a paralyzing thought struck Hornby. He himself had just called at the woman's hotel and asked for her! There was no chance of that sleepy clerk's not remembering him.

He was in for it. He had certainly acted like a fool that night. A fine crook he would make.

However, he might first find out whether the woman still had that money on her person.

A few more matches and the worst fears he harbored were confirmed. Lora Lawall did not have her three thousand dollars.

The handsome beaded bag, lying at her side, gaped empty when Hornby found it. The money was gone!

CHAPTER IX

THE GIRL

AS HORNBY stumbled away from the dead woman on the sand, he was conscious of a moving shadow near by. Since the darkness there under that boardwalk was peopled with murderers to John Hornby, he started away from the scene as rapidly as possible, still determined not to return to his boarding-house with the green-and-gold vase.

The horror of his own position when that yawning young clerk at Lora Lawall's hotel would remember the man who had asked for her at

eleven-thirty that night, was weighing upon him.

He had not only permitted Lemont to beat him at a crook trick, but he had gotten himself involved in murder.

Why had he been at the hotel of the woman who had won the cash prize at Boldinski's? What could he, the salesman in the book store next door, have had to do with her? What would he say when he was questioned?

On the other hand, if he had used his brains and simply trailed the woman, he might have been present when she had met her murderer under the boardwalk. If that murderer was Lemont, he would have had a fine chance to get the money from him as hush money!

Yes, he had certainly made a muddle of it. And a clever crook would have come out on top. Lemont now, possibly, had the entire three thousand dollars!

NO MATTER what fear dogged his heels, no matter what that had been that had lurked there in the shadows of the boardwalk, he must get rid of that vase before he returned to his room. His hands must be free of everything that linked him to that guessing contest at Boldinski's.

But as Hornby stumbled on along the loose sand toward the beginning of the piling of the old pier, the moving shadow seemed to trail him. And presently he turned about in desperation and stood still, his eyes searching the gloom, his nerves wrung with fear and suspense.

Something had tracked him from the scene of the crime. Rather than allow the horror to follow him to the end of that pier from which he wished to fling the vase, Hornby preferred to stop and face it where he was. At least he could make a fight for his life.

But the shadow that stepped from the gloom, that came swiftly toward him over the sand, was a girl! A girl with fair, uncovered head and a light, gliding walk that he knew.

"Don't throw that vase away," said the voice of the girl Hornby had robbed. "I want it!"

HORNBY sat down suddenly on some of the piling of the old pier. The reaction was too great. His legs simply gave way beneath him and he sat gaping up at the slight figure of the girl as she stood holding her light cloak about her.

"I've been trailing you all evening," she went on. "And you gave me some chase. You see, I figured you would try to throw this vase away—and I didn't know whether it was mine or Boldinski's. But I want it.

"The shelf in my shop that you took it from is the safest place for it. You have no idea how smart the cops are. They find a clue in the most unheard-of things."

"You knew I took the vase?" said Hornby miserably.

"Sure I did," nodded the girl. "I missed it right away. I figured you must have taken it. And when I remembered your big, black bag and found the bunch of tissue paper on the floor, I knew it.

"I'd seen that vase at Boldinski's, and I knew mine was like it. I was going to fill mine full of the kind of beads Boldinski used and then just guess at the thing. I thought I had a chance. I'd examined Boldinski's several times. I knew how full it was.

"But come on. We better not talk here. I was right on your heels when you found—her. I was going to call to you when that scream came and you bolted back to find out what was wrong. You made an awful mistake

when you went up to the 'Evelyn' to see that woman."

Hornby rose and hastened along at the girl's side, the vase still bumping at his legs. His world had turned completely about.

"Who killed her?" he mumbled. "I didn't. I give you my word I——"

"I know it!" snapped the girl. "Wasn't I right on your heels? Of course you didn't kill her, but you gotta be ready to find yourself all mixed up in it. You went to see her tonight."

"I can't tell the truth about that," groaned Hornby.

He felt like a worm. What was this fine, smart little girl thinking of him? How quick and sharp she talked and how cool she was!

"Victor Lemont worked a clever trick tonight," ran on the girl as they reached the boardwalk and hastened down it toward her little store a dozen blocks below.

"I saw smack through it. He knew that woman and it was all fixed. And if I hadn't trailed you, I'd know more than I do."

"I'd have trailed her if I had had any brains," groaned Hornby. "Look here, you might as well know what a low-down crook I am. I filled your vase with beads and then I put it in the place of the one Boldinski had, the one in this bag here.

"I meant to take the real vase back after I had counted the beads, but I lost my nerve. I knew I didn't dare. But there were *no* three thousand four hundred and thirteen beads in in that vase tonight. I know, because I myself put exactly three thousand four hundred and *ten* beads in there and that's what I said on my ticket."

"Lemont took care of that," nodded the girl with a curl of her lip. "It was clever. He took no chance that the vase wouldn't be tampered with. At the last possible moment he slid in three more beads. And the woman knew it.

"But I wouldn't have gotten the money anyhow, for I figured on three thousand four hundred beads and I threw in five more for luck. Mine was just a guess, but I thought I had a chance because I had a vase just like Boldinski's."

"Lemont met the woman, of course," gloomed Hornby when they entered the cheap little shop and the girl turned on a light, "and he killed her for the cash."

"Maybe she didn't have the cash and he thought she double-crossed him," suggested the girl.

"Didn't have it?"

"Yes. Maybe somebody took it from her, or else she tried to pretend someone had. But it was a crook trick all right, and Lemont and that woman pulled it. I saw them together on the walk late a few nights ago, just as we were closing the store. They were walking close together, like pals, and I guess they thought they were safe, away down here.

"But I was interested in Lemont. I knew his type, and I'd seen that vase up at Boldinski's that was just like mine. And so tonight when Lora Lawall stepped up and grabbed off that three thousand, I saw red."

"I've always hated Lemont," grumbled Hornby. "All these weeks his smooth tongue has gotten on my nerves. I wanted that cash. I wanted to get the best of him."

"Well, *you'd* never get the best of him," nodded the girl. "He could take your scarf pin right from under your nose."

As she spoke she removed the green-and-gold vase from the black bag, emptied the beads on a tray, and set the vase on the vacant space on the dirty lower shelf where Hornby had first spotted it or, rather, one like it.

"Why do you do this for me?" he asked, puzzled.

"I will admit," said the girl, "that at first I was pretty well down on you, but I really could not accuse you of taking my vase, although I felt sure you had it. I had seen you in the store next to Boldinski's, and when I walked up there the next morning you slid out the back door. That put me wise to the game you were going to try.

"I am not quite sure what I would have done if you had gotten that money. I think I would have gone after you. But it kind of made us partners when I saw that woman and that slick Lemont pull their trick. But I wanted to make sure I was right about you and my vase, and so I stuck around and followed you."

"They will find out that I asked for the Lawall woman at her hotel tonight," groaned Hornby. "And I've got no alibi for the time she was killed."

"Don't borrow trouble," advised the girl tartly, "although I will say you surely have gotten yourself in wrong. Maybe the clerk won't remember you. The one best bet is to go home and keep your mouth shut. What's that on your sleeve?"

HORNBY glanced down at his arm. It was streaked with red.

"It's that paint down on the beach!" he shuddered. "There was a sign on the post near the body that said 'wet paint.' I didn't see it until I'd brushed against it."

"Well, there's no use in your being branded like that," said the girl briskly. "Maybe the criminal carries a mark, too. I've got turpentine here. Better not wear this suit tomorrow."

While the girl's swift fingers worked with his coat, Hornby glanced down at her with admiration.

"You are a brick," he said humbly. "And I even stole from you, too! I don't even know your name."

"I know yours," smiled the girl. "I asked that undertaker partner of yours in the book store. But I don't make any secret of mine. It's Jerry Moore, Geraldine for long. My brother and I own this store. We inherited it, but we aren't making a howling success of it."

"You've been mighty fine to me," said Hornby as he turned away. "And you shan't be dragged into this thing even if they get me. But it makes me wild to think of Lemont getting away with this, cash and all."

"I wouldn't jump at conclusions," said the girl wisely. "Maybe he didn't get the cash. Maybe he didn't even kill her. All we know about Lemont is that he was in a crook deal with this woman to get old Boldinski's three thousand.

"If you hadn't spotted my vase down here and I hadn't spotted the one at Boldinski's that was like it, neither one of us would have been on to Lemont."

CHAPTER X

THE NEXT DAY

JOHN HORNBY did not sleep that night. The horrible experience of the evening and his own keen disappointment vied with visions of Jerry Moore and green-and-gold vases that danced about him wildly, streams of gay glass beads pouring from them.

When he walked down the boardwalk toward the bookstore next morning, Hornby felt all in.

The waves were rolling up on the sand, gleaming with the warm sunshine. The old broken-down pier from which he had tried to throw away Jerry Moore's vase thrust its dark, uneven nose out into the danc-

ing water without the slightest suggestion of the sinister aspect it had worn the night before. But Hornby kept his face turned from it.

Of course they had found the woman. Heaven alone knew how soon they would be after him. That clerk down at the "Evelyn" had been sleepy, but his eyes had been keen enough. Not a chance of his not remembering the man who had called to see the murdered woman at eleven thirty.

Hornby had told him he was calling for a friend, but how could he back that up if they questioned him? What friend? He had only muddled the thing up worse by saying that.

Blakely, sour of visage as ever, was in the store when Hornby entered, and he looked up with a curt nod and a half grin.

"Well, John, and so you didn't pull that three thousand, eh?" was his greeting. "Too down in the mouth to come back and admit it last night, weren't you? They always have those things fixed. I wouldn't have handed Boldinski one of my dollars, you can bet."

"Yes, I guess it was fixed," said Hornby dully.

The morning passed somehow. Hornby did not hear anything about a body having been found on the sand and he did not dare ask Blakely, who was a man of few words anyhow.

And at eleven o'clock he was horrified to hear the silken voice of Lemont lifted in its usual harangue to those who passed on the boardwalk.

It was all that Hornby could do to keep away from going in to look at the man whom he considered a thief and a murderer. How could he stand there on that rug-draped platform and go on with his hackneyed spiel?

When had the body been found and why wasn't there some excitement about it? Why did no one say anything, do anything? Didn't the police know she was the woman who had won the famous contest at Boldinski's the night before?

The suspense began to get on Hornby's nerves. Everyone who entered the book store gave him a painful jolt.

AT LUNCH time he entered one of the rear rooms to open a crate of new books, and all unknowingly took the next step that involved him in the strange crime on the beach. The instant he opened the door of the little room where he and Blakely stored all sorts of things, and hung bathing suits and worn-out garments, rain-coats and umbrellas, a strange odor stopped him on the threshold, an odor that took the shaky Mr. Hornby back in a sickening instant to the horrible events of the night before.

There in that close, warm, little room it was the stronger—the unmistakable smell of turpentine!

There was no reason why there might not be a smell of turpentine in that room. All sorts of things were stuck away there.

But, of course, Hornby saw a man's coat and that painted post under the boardwalk, saw Jerry Moore's swift fingers rubbing at his sleeve—heard her soft, cool voice: "Maybe the criminal carries a mark, too!"

Like a hound on the scent he tracked down that trail of turpentine, and brought up smack against an old coat of Blakely's that hung with some bathing suits against the wall in a corner! There was no doubt about it. The sleeve of that coat had recently, very recently, been rubbed with turpentine.

Hornby knew how his own coat had smelled that morning. He had

hung it out on a line in the sandy back yard himself.

But, good heavens — *Blakely's* coat! That of course could have no connection with the crime on the beach, the killing of the woman, Lemont's accomplice, who had won that three thousand dollars! Blakely had never shown the slightest interest in that contest. He had only roused now and then to taunt Hornby about it.

There might, therefore, be quarts of turpentine on Blakely's clothes, but it would have nothing to do with the painted post on the sand below, beside which the body of Lora Lawall had lain.

And yet, his nose against that old coat sleeve, Hornby felt rather weak and sick. He roused presently and examined the coat. He knew it well. It was an old worn affair that Blakely wore at times in the shop. He was not the careful dresser that Hornby was.

But he could not remember whether Blakely had had it on the night before or not. Folks did not notice Blakely much. He was always so darn disagreeable and sour-looking. Only a quiet, unobstrusive soul like John Hornby could have worked with him for so long.

Well, for luck he would take down the coat and look at it. If he found a streak of red paint, now——

BUT HE did not. What Hornby found was something quite different, and it turned him temporarily into a motionless image. In one of the worn old pockets of the turpentine-scented coat he unearthed a great wad of bills, fastened with a rubber band and wrapped in a gay bit of silk!

As Hornby stood there, for the moment petrified, he saw the jeweled hands of Lora Lawall receive that bunch of cash from Boldinski, wrap it herself in the gay little bit of silk and tuck it away in her huge beaded bag.

Turpentine on this old coat of Blakely's, and the three thousand-dollar prize money for which the woman on the beach had been killed in Blakely's pocket!

This unexpected development was too much for Hornby. His bewildered mentality was not equal to coping with it. His thoughts had been so entirely taken up with the guilt of Victor Lemont and with his own bungling connection with the dead woman, that this discovery involving his fellow worker who had never shown the slightest interest in the contest next door simply floored him.

He did not know how long he stood there. But during that time he got his thoughts together somehow. Whether Blakely, wild as it seemed, had had anything to do with the death of the Lawall woman or not, this was certainly the money Boldinski had handed her, here in that old coat.

And Blakely had not as much right to it as he had. There was no doubt at all in Hornby's mind about the money. He would take it himself. After all he had risked, all the humiliation he had passed through before Jerry Moore, the cash had justly come into his hands!

Through a trail of blood, it had drifted to him! He had as much right to it as Lemont or Blakely.

As ridiculous as it seemed even yet to suspect Blakely of this thing, Hornby realized that if Blakely were guilty, there would be no safer place to hide the money than in the pocket of that old coat in the little rear room of the book shop. Only the turpentine scent had drawn him to it.

And that would have meant nothing to him if he himself had not got-

ten smeared with that red paint below the boardwalk, and Jerry Moore had not cleaned his coat!

Well, at any rate, the thing to do now was to pocket the cash and keep quiet. No one on earth could know that he had the money. Of course, if they came questioning him about calling to see Lora Lawall, it would not be well to be found with the prize money she had won in his possession.

But he could think out a hiding place. And he could watch Blakely. If Blakely himself had placed that cash in his old coat, then it would be a horrible shock to him to find it gone. He would give himself away somehow.

BUT EVEN yet Hornby could not assimilate the idea that, after all, Lemont had not gotten that money. It was clear why he had killed the woman—if he had.

She had, of course, been unable to produce the three thousand which they were to divide. For the reason that Blakely had it. And Lemont had thought she was holding out on him and had killed her.

But why had not Blakely killed her? The coat seemed to scream at him that Blakely had been near that painted post the night before.

What, then, was Lemont thinking? Had he gone to the trysting place and found the woman dead and the money gone from her bag?

There had been little time for that, for Hornby himself had gone directly to the body after hearing the choking scream on the beach.

Well, he was no detective. Let them find out the truth. He had the three thousand that he had schemed and risked all to gain after all.

Blakely's tall figure darkened the door and Hornby bent hastily over the crate of books he had come to open.

"What are you doing back here?" asked Blakely, and Hornby fancied his voice sounded suspicious. "You are about as much good in the store of late as somebody next door. I'll have to tell the boss you're getting neglectful, Hornby, if you don't wake up."

Hornby met Blakely's scowl with a grin.

"What have you been using turpentine for?" he asked. "I'm about strangled with it."

"I took some spots off an old suit," said Blakely carelessly. "Come on out here. There're several people in the store."

"I wonder," thought Hornby with a backward glance at the old coat, "if those spots were made with red paint?"

CHAPTER XI

TWO CALLERS

LATE that afternoon Lemont and another man sauntered into the bookstore.

Hornby could not recall any other time when Victor Lemont had been in his store, and he did not know the other man. He was a small, thin person with a graying mustache and little, narrow eyes.

"Say, Hornby, heard the latest?" Lemont began at once. And Blakely, with a grunt, took his feet from the counter and laid down the book he was reading.

"The latest?" asked Hornby, trying to speak naturally and wishing that he had hidden that three thousand dollars somewhere and not kept it in his pocket. "What do you mean?"

He did not understand Lemont's free and easy way with him either. He just knew the fellow to nod to.

"Yes. The woman who won our prize last night was killed on the

beach below here and the money taken from her."

"You don't say!" gasped Hornby, looking at his fellow worker. "Killed—murdered?"

"Sure, murdered," nodded Lemont. "You saw her, didn't you?"

"I saw her get the cash, yes," replied Hornby steadily.

The man with Lemont had picked up a dictionary and was studying it closely.

"You were interested in that contest, weren't you?"

"I had a ticket—sure," said Hornby.

"Did you have a ticket, Blakely?" Lemont swung upon the other man suddenly.

"I did not," sneered Blakely. "I don't go in for that crooked stuff."

"Crooked!" flushed Lemont. "What do you mean? That was a straight, honest guessing contest! It was run as well as we knew how to run it."

"I'll bet it was," said Blakely with grim significance.

Hornby stared from one man to the other. And he suddenly woke up to the fact that the stranger was staring at him. This was not so good, considering that he had that three thousand in his jocket. That and the clerk at the 'Evelyn' would be enough to finish him.

"Say, you lay off this crooked stuff," said Lemont angrily. "If Boldinski heard you he'd make you prove it."

"Maybe I could," said Blakely darkly. "Who knows?"

Hornby stared at his partner, aghast. It seemed as though he did not know Blakely, had never known him! Anyhow, he had never encountered such nerve as this!

"Are you going around quizzing everybody who had a ticket?" went on Blakely still sneering. "I guess you'll be a year at it. Old Boldinski must have cleaned up thousands on that thing. Far more than he gave out."

"Sure he cleaned up," said Lemont indignantly. "What for did he try it? But it was an honest contest like any other. Just as straight as a chance on a doll at a church bazaar."

"Oh, listen!" chortled Blakely, glancing at his fellow worker.

But Hornby was lost in amazement between these two men, one of whom he was sure had killed the woman on the beach. Had the murderer, one or the other of them, seen him when he had found the body? The criminal could not have been far off, for he had had no time.

"What we want to get at, Hornby, is whether you knew Lora Lawall before last night or not," said Lemont, then.

"We can't find anyone who knew her and I thought—well, I may as well be frank. I thought I had seen you with her before the prize was awarded."

John Hornby gasped. He stared at the cool, pleasant face of Lemont and he had no words, for the rage that choked him. He saw through the man's game. He had picked him to take his own place.

And when the clerk at the "Evelyn" backed up this insinuation, and if they found that three thousand in his pocket—good night!

"How dare you say I knew that woman!" he flared. "I never heard of such a thing! I only saw her twice in my life, and both times were in Boldinski's store—first when she bought a ticket and then when she won the money."

"Well, all right. But I was sure——" hesitated Lemont; and his manner was convincing.

"Come on," nodded the stranger curtly. "If this man knew the Lawall woman we'll find it out. Somebody knew her damn well."

WHEN the two had left the store, Blakely turned and stared at Hornby.

"Did you know who that guy with Lemont was?" he asked slowly.

"No, I didn't," flashed Hornby, still trembling with rage and fear.

"Well, he's Chief of Detectives Haddock," nodded Blakely, "and I wouldn't want him on my trail. He's a cold-blooded bird."

Hornby had no words for a moment. The idea of these two men, Lemont and Blakely, both of them as deep in the case as they could be, one of them with the woman's blood on his hands, trying to involve him, use him! He was so mad that he simply sputtered.

The only bright spot in life was that three thousand in his pocket, which he had removed from Blakely's pocket. There was no forgetting that.

And he could not turn and say that it had been Lemont who had known the woman—not without involving himself and Jerry Moore! He would not have known that Lemont and the woman had pulled a crook trick, unless he had tried to be crooked himself!

But what about Blakely—Blakely, who now had taken out his filthy old pipe, elevated his feet again to the counter, picked up his book and apparently shed the entire affair?

Blakely, and not Hornby, had the makings of the real criminal, Hornby recognized then. If Blakely had stolen that vase he would have taken it back again and completed the trick. And Hornby had his doubts that Lemont could have bested Blakely.

"The idea of that fool Lemont trying to mix me up in this thing," growled Hornby at last. "What made him pick on me?"

"I can tell him you're no lady's man," chuckled Blakely, turning a page.

Hornby glared at the other man who seemed entirely unconscious of his blazing eyes. The only thing that comforted Hornby was the money in his pocket. And he did not dare ask Blakely even about that turpentine on his old coat!

If only he had the strength to put back that three thousand into Blakely's coat, summon Haddock and tell him about that and the turpentine, the tables might be turned.

But would they be? Haddock would ask what he knew about turpentine? Why the smell of it made him suspicious? And that was an endless trail, if once he started on it, that would lead him and Jerry Moore, too, into all sorts of difficulties. The story of the stolen vase would come out.

No, every way he turned his lips seemed to be sealed.

And then Hornby felt a cold chill creep over him. Pressed against the window of the book store, eyes staring straight at him, was the face of the clerk at the "Evelyn" Hotel!

CHAPTER XII

THE OFFER

I'M going home to supper," said Hornby abruptly and, without waiting for Blakely's reply, he got his hat and left the store by the rear door.

Once more the fresh air on his heated face was grateful. Hornby felt that nowhere but by the ocean would he have found that bracing air that seemed to buoy him right up. He did not know just where to turn.

Lemont had picked him for the goat, that was evident. He was simply placing him in his own position. And Blakely, if not the actual criminal, had certainly been on the beach in time to get the woman's money

and mark himself with that red paint.

What would Blakely think when he found the money gone? He might suspect Hornby, but he would not dare say anything. If Hornby's lips were sealed, so would Blakely's be. There was comfort in that.

But he must find a place to put that money now that the clerk from the woman's hotel had spotted him. Hornby did not see just how the clerk had managed that so soon, and he felt sure that the detectives had been at him.

Of course they had gone first to the hotel where the woman had stopped, and the clerk had given a description of the man who had called on her late the night before. Had Lemont or any of them recognized Hornby?

That must have been behind the call he had just had from Lemont and the chief of detectives. How pleased Lemont must be! He evidently knew nothing of Blakely's connection with the thing.

He did not feel safe until he reached his own room, and there he sank into a chair and dropped his head in his hands. He must think before anybody got him into a corner.

First of all, where should he hide that money that he had sworn would be his? And then, how should he answer the question about his calling on the woman the night before, and Lemont's statement that he knew her?

HE WAS not, however, to have much time. A tap on his door roused him to the immediate necessity of hiding the money.

There was a torn place in the seat of the worn old chair he was occupying and into that, before he replied to the knock, Hornby thrust the wad of bills Lora Lawall had wrapped in the gay little bit of silk. When he opened the door his worst fears were realized, for there before him stood the clerk from the Evelyn Hotel!

"Could I see you a minute, Mr. Hornby?" asked the young man, glancing behind him.

"I guess so, but I don't know you from Adam," said Hornby boldly. "What do you want with me? I haven't had my supper yet."

The clerk sidled into the room and closed the door behind him. He wore a grin that Hornby did not like.

"I wanted to talk to you," he nodded. "It is just an idea of my own. You know, of course, that I know you came to see Miss Lawall last night at her hotel. Guess you remember all right that I was the clerk you asked about her. Tom Hoover is my name."

Hornby saw there was no sense in denying that it had been he who had asked for Lora Lawall.

"Well?" he asked.

Hoover grinned. "Say, listen, everybody knows she was killed down on the beach," he said. "And nobody in town seems to know her. The other clerk and me, we never knew anybody but you to call to see her."

"What are you getting at?" snapped Hornby.

"She had won that three thousand dollar prize up at the Boldinski store," went on Hoover. "And when they found her, her beaded bag was open and the cash was gone. It is plain that she was killed for it. What I came up here to ask you is, do you want me to forget that you came to the hotel last night to see Lora Lawall, or don't you?"

"Are you hinting that I killed her?" asked Hornby coldly.

"Oh gosh, no. How do I know who killed her?" cried the young man in horror. "But I just thought it looked bad for you, kind of, nobody else in town knowing her and

all. I thought maybe you would give me some cash to forget that you stopped in last night."

"If you had not already seen the police you would not have known where I was or what my name was," said Hornby.

"I haven't seen the cops," said Hoover doggedly. "They quizzed my buddie, the other clerk. But I w nt up to see that Boldinski store today like lots of other folks, and I saw you next-door. It was a cinch to find out your name. And—and where you lived."

The clerk was lying and Hornby knew it. But he did not know how to deal with him or the situation.

"I thought maybe you would give me some money to keep quiet," went on Hoover slyly.

"How much did you think I would give you?" snapped Hornby.

"Well—maybe a thousand dollars," grinned Hoover. "You see, it won't be so nice when they get onto the fact that you were at the hotel last night asking for her just before she was killed. You had plenty of time to get from the Evelyn to the place on the beach where they found her.

"I ain't saying you did it, but I want you should see just where you stand. If you knew her and you're innocent, you better come across—that is, unless you want me to talk."

"How do you think a fellow like me, working in a book store, has a thousand dollars to hand you?" asked Hornby steadily.

His brain was working rapidly. This man, he felt sure, had been sent to him to make the offer he had made. And if Hornby bit and handed over the big bribe it would prove to the police that he had the cash that had been stolen from the woman. It would be an easy thing for them to learn that he had only his salary and no bank account, no big sum of ready cash on hand.

If he gave this fellow the money, he admitted guilt where there was none! For although he had taken that cash from Blakely's terpentine-scented coat, John Hornby was innocent of murder.

No one, however, save Jerry Moore knew that. And he had no alibi!

"Better be sensible and come across," nodded Hoover, watching him. "I can keep quiet all right. I'll just forget all about you."

"It was hard luck that I happened to stop to see Miss Lawall," said Hornby. "But I did and so there it is. I didn't kill her, Hoover, and what is more I didn't know her. And you will have to talk, because I have no money to give you. I only get twenty-eight dollars a week."

Hoover flushed angrily.

"Say, this will put you in jail," he snapped. "Are you crazy? If you didn't know her, what did you come around there at half-past eleven to see her for? That's pretty thin."

"What I went to see her for is none of your business," said Hornby, more than ever convinced that the police had sent Hoover to test him. "And you can get out of here now, my friend, just as fast as possible."

"And you won't give me that thousand?" asked Hoover with a wink. "You better think——"

"Get out!" roared Hornby and flung open the door.

"All right," said Hoover, white with anger, "I'm going straight to the police station."

"I guess not," sneered Hornby. "I guess you've told the cops already all that you could."

WHEN the door was locked he sank down limply into the old chair in which he had hidden the roll of bills. He knew that he had just escaped a trap, but that it was only a matter of

time now when Haddock, that quiet, gray-mustached man who had entered the book store with Lemont, would question him. They had just used Hoover to save themselves a bit of work.

And why *had* he gone to see the Lawall woman? Could he tell the police he had felt sure that she had won the money by a trick, a trick that Lemont had engineered, and that he had gone to see her, a stranger, to make her confess? But why would he have been so sure the thing had been a trick?

Ah—there he would have to confess about the theft of the vase and his own part in the thing, and drag in Jerry Moore, and where would he be after all that? It would seem to the police that he had been only the more determined to get the cash that a smarter trick had kept from him, and had trailed the woman and killed her for the money.

Yes, how would confession help him or involve Lemont, the man he wished to see arrested for the crime?

And where did Blakely come in?

And here a new thought dawned upon Hornby. If he told the truth, why would not the police figure that Jerry Moore had been in the scheme with him? Jerry had had the vase that was a copy of the one at Boldinski's. And it would be Jerry's word that would involve Lemont with the Lawall woman, and that would also be Hornby's alibi!

If he told the truth and ruined himself, the very things that Jerry Moore could say in his behalf would lose all value.

Hornby groaned, sitting there in the ragged chair, on the wad of cash that the murderer had taken from the dead woman on the beach. His brain was not equal to finding a way out of the thing. He had never had to think a lot in his life. And if Haddock or some of his men came up and searched his room, they would certainly find that money.

He did not dare put it in a bank. If he took it back to the rear room of the book store and put it in the pocket of another old coat, Blakely, when he missed it, would find it there.

That had been a slick hiding-place, all right, and smart of Blakely, if it hadn't been for the turpentine.

THE TURPENTINE! Great Scott, there was his own coat which he had left down on the line in the yard! Better bring it in. The cops certainly realized by this time that if the criminal had brushed against that painted post near the body, he would have had to use turpentine to remove the stains. There was enough on him already without having one of them find his coat.

Stealing past the dining-room where everyone was eating supper, Hornby slipped out around the side of the house, treading in loose, dry sand, the damp ocean breeze in his heated face. As usual it braced him, but not sufficiently for the shock he was about to receive.

The line that the colored cook had stretched across the small sandy yard was empty. His coat was gone!

(*To be concluded.*)

The Wrong Man

By GILBERT RIDDELL

AS the girls turned away Allan Brown dried the glasses with the utmost care. They had ignored him as usual, their eyes only for the young doctor who had just treated them to their favorite Saturday Night Screams, the most expensive soda drink served in Greyville.

Mansfield, having escorted them outside and put them in their car, returned to the soda fountain and smiled engagingly upon Allan. It would be necessary, he mentioned, to charge the drinks.

"Your account stands eighteen dollars and fifty cents," said Allan, "and should have been paid last week."

Mansfield frowned slightly and got his check-book out. As he wrote he remarked to Allan:

"I can't see why you're so keen about old Green's business. He pays you the lowest salary in town, I hear."

"That's right," admitted Allan. He took the check from Mansfield's evidently reluctant fingers and put it in the cash register. Then he began peeling the apron from his thin shoulders.

"Closing up?" asked Mansfield, in an attempt to offset his recent unpleasant speech.

"Yes," said Allan tersely.

Mansfield's self-approval was ruffled. He chafed at the thought that this common fellow regarded him with disapproval.

He, the beau ideal of Greyville! To be criticised by the most neglected individual in town! A fellow that not even the most unpopular girl in Greyville would look at a second time. He gave the soda clerk a contemptuous glance and went out.

Allan did not see the glance, nor would he have heeded it if he had. Doctor Mansfield could not know it, but the soda clerk was as indifferent

to the gay young flappers who gathered around his counter as they were to him.

Nearly a week ago he had seen a girl at the door of the fashionable gown shop on Fourth Street as he passed on his way to luncheon. She was a customer, evidently, who had come to the door to get the daylight on the pink silk evening gown the saleswoman was carrying. She had raised her head suddenly and their eyes had met.

Since then the girls who gathered around his soda counter were so much jetsam in a world where only he and that girl existed.

THE other clerk bade Allan goodnight and went out. Brown donned his old, light coat that had grown small for him as he toiled upward physically, if not financially. Then he was ready to set out for his gaunt "sleeping-room," as furnished rooms are termed in Kentucky.

And that was a just name for, although the place was quiet, it was furnished only for sleeping purposes. Besides the comfortable bed, however, Allan's room contained what he considered a priceless article of furniture—a full-length mirror in which he could admire the reflection of his tall figure when he arrayed himself in his evening clothes.

This suit of evening clothes was one of the best suits of evening clothes that the local tailor could turn out. It was Allan's only conceit and he had bought it hopefully for the occasion to which so far he had not been invited. He had no social ambitions worthy of the name, and the suit was merely the outward sign of the inward longing for companionship, for some human intercourse of the sort his fancy best liked to paint.

As he emerged from the drug store, intent only upon reaching the solitude of his room, he looked ahead sharply and paused.

Against the street lamp on the corner a girl dressed in a gray costume was standing. He recognized her at once as Ethel Green, the girl of the pink silk evening gown and the only child of the man who had erected that modern structure that houses Green's Hotel, Green's Theatre, Green's Office Building, and Green's Pharmacy. The man, in fact, who paid him his salary.

That Halleck Green himself was at that moment speaking to an assemblage of financiers in the banquet hall of the hotel was pretty certain and not surprising. But that his daughter should be standing on a street corner alone, at midnight, of a Saturday night, was amazing. Allan knew, as well as everyone in Greyville did, that Ethel Green never went anywhere, never had any beaux; led, in fact, almost the life of a recluse.

But that she should be standing there with a pistol in her hand was staggering.

He took a step forward, emerging from the shadow of the awning over the drug store door. There was a sharp flash, a loud report, and Allan Brown fell quietly to the sidewalk.

Ethel Green had shot him.

THE girl did not move from the spot, but waited quietly while the crowd gathered about her, and the policeman came on the run from the traffic signal in the street. She handed the weapon to the officer as he approached her.

"I suppose you know who I am," she said.

Officer Crowley coughed with embarrassment as he recognized her. That Ethel Green, known to everyone in Greyville as the quiet, retiring young daughter of Halleck Green, should have shot anyone was incre-

dible. But that he should dare arrest her was unthinkable.

"Please get a taxi," Ethel went on calmly. "I don't think I could walk to the station house. I feel weak."

"Someone," Officer Crowley suggested, "ought to tell her father. He's at the banquet tonight."

A handsome young man, who was pushing his way through the crowd, came up to Crowley.

"I sent the doorman for him," he said. "He'll be here directly. In the meantime, let me examine the man."

There had been a number of doctors in the crowd attracted by Ethel's shot, but it was characteristic of Herbert Mansfield that he should have taken matters into his hands. His practice was new, but it was popular because, as the Irish say, "he had a way with him."

Ethel watched the doctor as he bent over Allan Brown and, as Mansfield turned the man over, she exclaimed:

"Oh, I've shot the wrong man!

"I suppose that won't make any difference," Ethel said to Crowley, "if I've killed him."

Doctor Mansfield had signaled to men near him and was raising the man up with their help.

"You haven't killed him," he said reassuringly.

A frown puckered Ethel's white forehead.

"Then I'm not much of a shot!" she exclaimed contemptuously.

ALLAN BROWN, swaying between two men, wiped his forehead with his hand and looked at his fingers curiously. Then he glanced about and asked:

"Who shot me?"

As Ethel was directly in his line of vision, and as the policeman had gripped her arm in a businesslike way, he was effectively answered.

But Ethel did not hesitate to make assurance doubly sure.

"I shot you, Mr. Brown. I mistook you for someone else—someone whom you resemble. I hope that, as you are not injured, you will pardon me."

Ethel watched his face as she waited for an answer and, as none came, a frown deepened on her forehead. Her eyes presently faltered before Allan's prolonged stare, and her lips dropped. As if shaking off something unpleasant, she tossed her head and looked in the opposite direction.

On that side the crowd was parting to admit a large, irate man in evening clothes. His florid face was almost purple, and his voice trembled as he exclaimed:

"Ethel!"

"Father!" she answered, her sang froid that had receded a minute back by Allan's silence restored by the sight of her parent. "Don't be frightened. I haven't killed anyone. Perhaps Mr. Crowley will let me go home with you."

The policeman turned to Allan Brown. He could not see himself arresting Ethel Green, but, nevertheless, Brown undoubtedly had some rights in the matter.

"If it's all right with you," he began.

"It is quite all right," agreed Allan quickly. Then he turned to Halleck Green.

"If you wish me to come with you," he began.

"Certainly not." Ethel interposed before her father could speak. "You are not the man I thought you were."

The crowd gave Allan a closer scrutiny, in which Halleck Green did not fail to join. Tall and thin, nondescript of feature and coloring, a hundred men might have borne him some slight resemblance. As the Green car swept up to the curb Halleck was vowing that in two minutes he would know who his daughter's intended victim had been.

"NOW, young lady," he said firmly, as he closed the window between them and the chauffeur, "what does this mean?"

Ethel shrugged her shoulders. "What does it usually mean when a girl decides to kill a man?"

She eyed her father with an air of triumph.

"You mean—you wish me to believe——" he stammered, enraged.

"Whatever you like," she finished for him.

"But—you've always been so quiet—you never seemed to like men. I've taken such care of you, watched over you so carefully— How dare you do a thing like this? There are other ways! Have you thought of the consequences?"

He was only beginning to realize them himself. Back there, before that crowd he had had to crush down every thought, only dwelling upon the problem of getting Ethel home.

But now he began to see tomorrow's headlines:

"DAUGHTER OF WEALTHY GREYVILLE MAN SHOOTS ALLAN BROWN!"

Instinctively he knew that the great story for the newspaper men would be the exalted state of the wronged girl and the lowly state of the man she had shot.

"Don't worry," said Ethel mockingly. "Doubtless we shall live this down."

"Live it down!" cried Green. "You'll never live it down until your dying day! We'd have to leave Greyville—and I can't go yet. I'm not ready. I always intended to go some day, to take you abroad. I was making money—saving you for that—for something better than Greyville could possibly offer you even in matrimony. And now——"

"And now I have ruined even my chances of matrimony," Ethel sneered.

"I—I can't talk about this with you," said her father after a minute, during which he pondered, amazed, at the change that had come to his meek daughter. "But you'll tell your mother tonight—before you sleep—or you don't sleep under my roof."

"Very well. Agreed," smiled Ethel, and she sprang out lightly as the car stopped at the driveway of their home.

It did not need his hand upon her arm to urge her upstairs to Mrs. Green's sleeping porch. But Ethel did not bother to tell her father that.

There was evidence of a light through the crack of the door as Green threw it open, calling his wife's name in a tone calculated to awaken her.

There was no reply, but neither of them called again, for they saw something that startled them both. Mrs. Green had fallen sideways from the bed, so that her head was almost touching the floor. She was unconscious. The telephone instrument had fallen from the night-stand beside her bed.

ETHEL stared at her father as he raised his wife up and placed her on the bed. "What is it, father?" she asked. Her face was white, her hands trembled as she picked the telephone up. "Shall I call for a doctor?"

"Better," said Green briefly; he was chafing his wife's hands and temples now, but he noticed Ethel's startled exclamation as she attempted to use the telephone.

"There's a reporter on here," she said, turning to her father. "He's been telling mother——"

"Just what I thought," said Green. "You've probably killed her."

"I'll call Doctor Mansfield," said Ethel. "He's probably up yet."

"Good," assented Green.

"Go downstairs," he continued, as

she rang off, "and tell Robert to admit him at once when he arrives."

Ethel hesitated. "You don't think, you don't really think, father—" she began.

"Go and do as I told you—leave me alone with my wife," said her father. She noted that he had carefully stopped himself upon the point of saying "your mother."

She drew near the bed, very white.

"Of course you understand, father. I never thought this would hurt mother."

"Of course you never thought," sneered her father, "you have no brains to think with."

A wave of color surged over the girl's fair skin, and she hurried from the room.

In the hall she encountered Robert.

The old negro was a devoted servant, and Ethel could not remember when she and her parents had not called upon Robert for help in any situation whatever nor when they had failed to find him at their beck and call, night and day. He was as familiar as her own shadow.

Yet now as he paused, waiting for her orders, she sensed a change in him. There was a mild curiosity in his glance—an air of wishing, but not daring, to extend his sympathy.

"Mother is ill," she began. "The doctor is coming—Doctor Mansfield. You know him, let him in the instant he arrives."

"Ah thought there was somethin' wrong," Miss Ethel," he told her. "'Cause Ah connected a man—a reportah who said he mus' speak to yo' mother—with her phone upstairs. And then it banged off."

"Then," she said, "you probably know what happened tonight. I can't explain. But I should be obliged if you would forget all about it."

"Certainly, Miss Ethel, certainly," Robert assured her, while the proud spirit that she had inherited from her father suffered.

"There's the bell," she said thankfully.

Waiting in the shadows at the foot of the stairs, Ethel heard Mansfield's voice and went forward.

THE young doctor was smiling as he passed Robert, and there was something about his expression that startled Ethel. It was the sort of thing called "a knowing smile." Could it be possible that Doctor Mansfield was laughing at her—and with her own servant.

The thought was so shocking that she was shaken physically by it, and put out her hand to take hold of the banisters. A human clasp encountered hers instead.

"Poor little girl!" exclaimed Mansfield. "Tonight has been too much for you. Come in here a moment."

He led her toward the living-room, for he was one of the few residents of Greyville familiar with that house, although he had been there principally in a professional capacity.

His arm about her was quite the tenderest and most comforting thing she had encountered since shooting Allan Brown, but his first words when he had got her out of sight of Robert sent shivers down her back.

"Don't you realize, little one," he said, frankly taking her into his arms, "that you can't get a man back when he's tired of you? And why should you want Brown back, anyway? Forget him; there are other men in the world."

She disengaged herself quite frantically. This was unendurable.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she cried. "I can't explain about that just now. But I'm not in love with Allan Brown. I never have been."

But Mansfield tried to get hold of her again; cave-man tactics had never failed with him. He caught her arm

and swung her back into his embrace.

"All right, all right," he whispered. "I believe you—and I don't even ask who the right man was. But come and see me tomorrow—at my office, at one-thirty. I realize I've been a stupid fool. I thought you were ice. I might have known better. Hidden fires——"

AT LAST Ethel extricated herself, her eyes wild with dismay, her skin white, her body shuddering.

"My mother," she panted.

"Oh, yes," said Mansfield. "Take me to her. And, by the way, if she doesn't know about tonight, keep it from her."

"Someone, a reporter, was phoning her all about it. That's why she fainted," said Ethel.

"Make your mother believe that she was dreaming," counseled Mansfield as they ascended the stairs.

Mrs. Green's coma had proven of a longer duration than usual. Halleck Green was commencing to regret his statement to Ethel that she had killed her mother. That deep-rooted superstition in all of us that "words are things" had him in his grip.

"Get a hot bath ready," Mansfield told Ethel, as he got out his instruments. The girl disappeared thankfully into the bathroom.

"Awfully sorry, Mr. Green," said Mansfield, "about tonight."

Halleck Green's business was well organized, but it would be several days before he knew that Mansfield had given a bad check for his sodas. It occurred to Mansfield to make himself solid with his creditor in this extremity.

"I suppose you don't know who the man is," he suggested.

"Not the faintest idea," said Green. "But I would give ten thousand dollars to know."

"And Ethel won't tell you," said Mansfield. "I am a doctor. We physicians know more about women than laymen can ever hope to. Let me come here—professional calls on her mother, you understand. I'll gain her confidence."

"Certainly, anything, if you can help me," agreed Halleck.

"In the meantime," advised Mansfield as Mrs. Green began to show signs of recovering consciousness, "keep it from your wife. The matter will probably be settled before she ever needs to know."

GREEN had told his daughter that she had not counted the cost of her escapade. She had heard him with a sneer; but as the days went on she forgot to scoff. She had fired a shot that, like the famous one that was "heard around the world," was followed by unbelievable, world-shaking reverberations. At least they shook Ethel's world.

She led a haunted life, in which a reporter seemed to spring at her from every bush in the garden, every tree in the road. She succeeded in eluding them, after the first surprise. And even to that one she had been untalkative, referring him to Allan Brown.

The first reporter returned at once to storm Allan's fortress of silence, and the others followed suit. Allan had to earn his living in the public gaze; there was no way in which he could evade reporters.

And although he systematically refused to talk, they made long stories out of what he did not say. They snapped his picture entering and leaving the pharmacy, dispensing soda water, buying socks.

Halleck Green came home every night full of dire threats as to what he would do if Ethel did not settle this matter.

"But how can I settle it, father?" she demanded. "You see for yourself that Allan really says nothing.

These reporters simply make up stories that fit around the eternal theme—that I shot him."

"With a blank cartridge!" groaned Green. "If you were so determined to make yourself ridiculous with this fellow, why didn't you use a bullet?"

"But I have told you that I had no intention of shooting Allan!" she exclaimed.

"Then who in the name of Heaven were you after?" demanded Green nightly.

And nightly Ethel turned away and stumbled out of his sight.

THE papers that he brought home with him and thrust at her had to be destroyed lest Mrs. Green catch an inkling of the dire happening. And Mrs. Green, never more than mildly interested in the news, began to wonder why Halleck never brought home an evening paper. Moreover, feeling quite as well as usual, she could see no reason why Doctor Mansfield should call daily on her; why she and Ethel should act like recluses, never going out, never shopping, never paying calls nor receiving them.

"If you ask me," she said to her husband, "it is not I who am ill. It is Ethel. Look at her. She is a shadow, and so white she is almost transparent. She never eats, never takes any exercise."

"She is worrying about you," her husband put her off.

"And I am sure she needn't," sighed Mrs. Green. "I feel perfectly well."

When the doctor called again, Mrs. Green cast her burden upon him. "There is something the matter with Ethel," she said.

"Nothing," smiled the doctor, "that cannot be cured. Have you ever thought that your daughter might be in love with someone, Mrs. Green?"

She had thought of but little else for several years, but there had been no chance of Ethel's meeting eligible young men, for Halleck Green's ideas differed from other Greyvillians on that subject. Mrs. Green sighed and held her peace. Here, she knew, was a forbidden topic. But she could not help noticing that the handsome young doctor spent more time with Ethel than he did with her when he called on his professional rounds.

Perhaps it was he—perhaps love would find a way. Mrs. Green began to pray every night after that night that Ethel and Herbert Mansfield—if he were her choice—would find their way.

Ethel crept about like a ghost, avoiding all chance encounters with her girl friends. Even at a distance she could see the covert smiles on their lips.

WHEN Doctor Mansfield came, as he did every day, and maneuvred an interview alone with her, she stared at him as at some monster. Puzzled by her aloofness, he pursued the only tactics he knew, which were brutal and indelicate, to gain for himself something out of this amazing opportunity that Fate had thrust his way.

Exasperated beyond his self-control one day, he said sarcastically: "Your name is a by-word in Greyville. Yet you think I am not good enough to touch you. Well, your father thinks differently."

"You mean," gasped Ethel, "that you discuss me with my father—that you speak of that night?"

"Why not? When everyone else does?" asked Mansfield. "You must be crazy to think you could do a thing like that and not be talked about. To advertise the fact that you had had an affair with Allan Brown!"

"But—I *said* he was the wrong man. Mr. Brown has never admitted that we had the slightest acquaintance."

"Exactly. He's a clever kid. But

he has never denied it, either. He refers everybody to you—and you won't talk."

That night she followed her father gladly into his library.

"Don't," she begged, as he began to spread the extras on his desk. "Don't show me any more of those awful papers. Send me away, father, send me away. Let me take mother with me somewhere—anywhere—out of this dreadful thing."

"Ah," said Green grimly, "you are beginning to count the cost. Perhaps you will tell me the name of the right man, so that I——"

He hesitated before the dreadful look in the girl's eyes.

"So that you can make him marry me," she said. "So that you can bribe him to take pity on me—to take pity on you, to rescue your name from this bitter association with that of your own drug clerk!

"Don't you realize, father, that if he has not come forward before this it would be useless for me to tell you his name? Besides, I wouldn't marry him for anything in the world now. Just send me away, father, send me away."

"No," he said deliberately, and leaned across the table to impress his words upon her. "No—not until you give me the name of the right man. Or, at least, not until you have made it possible for me to wipe that little cur of an Allan Brown off the map. When you have forced him out of the picture—I don't care how—then we'll talk."

Ethel straightened up, her lips moving for a moment before she spoke.

"Very well," she said thickly. "Very well, I'll get rid of him. I'll come back to you then." And she walked out of the study.

AFTER dinner the next night Ethel slipped along the hall to her father's room. Green was in his study with Herbert Mansfield. The doctor had been their guest at dinner, and the more openly he had displayed his admiration for the girl, the more she had shrunk from him.

She fumbled in the top drawer of her father's bureau and presently came out. Meeting Robert on the stairs, she merely raised her eyebrows, and the old servant nodded.

The lights were dim in the living-room, but as Allan Brown turned to greet his young hostess he noticed, as Mansfield had done at dinner, that there was an added sparkle to her eyes, her manner.

She paid no attention to his timidly outstretched hand.

"I hope I have come in time," said Allan. "I understood your servant to say over the telephone that you wanted me here at nine o'clock."

"You are in time," replied Ethel. She let her scornful glance dwell on his immaculate evening attire. Someone, she surmised, had lent him the clothes, or else he had hired them. It seemed incredible that anyone else could be so tall and thin.

But the clothes were good and fitted him perfectly. They gave him an air of distinction that Ethel had not noticed about him before.

She closed the wide doors that led into the dining-room and locked them. There was no other egress from the long, pleasant room save a door into the garden that she knew was locked. Then she came forward and laid a pistol on a table some three feet in front of Allan.

"This time," she said deliberately, "it is loaded—but not with blank cartridges."

Allan Brown gave a little start; he smiled uncertainly and drew back a step. He had been fingering a cigarette when she entered. After a moment he crossed to the smoking stand and lit it. Then he turned to her,

waving the smoke back, and smiled again.

He had, Ethel noticed, rather a nice smile; it seemed to light up his face. It was a friendly, chummy smile, too—not at all the sort of reaction she had expected from a man whose life was threatened.

"You are," he said pleasantly, "unusually charming in that pink gown. I remember when you bought it. I was passing Wells's shop when you carried it to the door to get the daylight on the color. It was just before you shot me the first time."

Ethel made no reply, but she glanced down at her gown as if she realized for the first time that she was wearing it.

"PERHAPS," he went on, "you won't mind telling me why you are so determined to destroy my life, Miss Green."

"I have no wish to destroy it," she said. "I never had any. You know very well that I have never exchanged a dozen words with you in my life. You knew that whomever I intended to shoot you were not the man. Yet you have allowed everyone to believe that you were."

"I have never said so," said Allan.

"But you have never denied it."

"You sent the reporters to me. You referred them to me. How did I know that I was not really your intended victim?"

"But it is absurd!"

"Because I am poor and you are rich and prominent? Agreed. But you might have had a reason—a kindly reason. You might have known how ugly and useless my life was. You might have intended your act as a humane one."

Ethel stared at him for a second and then laughed.

"You are crazy!" she exclaimed.

"I don't see that," replied Allan mildly. "Homicidal mania is not uncommon. How was I to know that you had not been seized with something of the sort? Even if your heart had not prompted you to help me out of an existence I am too cowardly to end myself?"

Ethel frowned uneasily. "I don't understand you," she said. "And I refuse to be sidetracked. You have made me ridiculous, and you know it. You have done it intentionally. You have persistently refused to deny that you were the man I intended to shoot. You have made other men disrespect me!"

"Not I," protested Allan, "but your own unbalanced, indiscreet act—to which you were goaded by the same neglect from which I have suffered. For, even if I *am* the recipient of the lowest salary your father dares to offer anyone, you are as unpopular as I am, Miss Green."

Ethel winced, her fair face flushing angrily.

"My popularity has nothing to do with the matter," she exclaimed savagely.

Then, suddenly weakening, she added in a very human little voice: "I've never had a chance."

"EXACTLY," agreed Allan eagerly; he put the fire out of his cigarette and crossed the room nearer to her. "No more chance than I have had. We have not been allowed to expand; to express ourselves. The same man has kept us both in a state of nullity. I knew all that.

"There was no one in this town who sympathized with you, for they thought you dull and insignificant. But I knew better. I had had a chance to look into your eyes—once. And they told me you were my kindred soul.

"What more unlikely than that you should shoot anyone! What unliklier person could you pick out than I! Do you see? That was the way I figured

things out. You did an extraordinary thing to show what you were made of.

"You waited, so I supposed, to give me a chance to do something extraordinary—perhaps something fine and noble and self-sacrificing. So I did my best to follow your lead. I did my best."

Ethel had sat very quietly during this long speech; something her father had said to her kept persistently recurring to her mind. "You haven't brains enough!"

It was true, she hadn't brains enough. She hadn't had brains enough to realize the consequences of her act. She would never have dreamed of the attitude that Allan had told her seemed natural to him.

She looked at him as at someone she saw for the first time. It occurred to her that it had been foolish to regard this man as a nonentity. His personality was a fine one, she saw, not to be brought out vividly except under unusual circumstances. She wondered whether it was only his evening clothes that had wrought such a change in him. Her eyes traveled over them, speculating.

"These are mine," said Allan, noticing her scrutiny. "They are not hired or borrowed. They cost me one hundred and twenty-five dollars, and they are paid for. I saved the money by almost starving myself. If I can understand your eyes they do something to me that I had hoped they would. They destroy my insignificance."

Ethel pushed her chair back and walked to the table where the pistol lay.

"They also imbue you with an amazing impertinence," she said. "The very idea of your speculating about me, about my home life! If you don't go——"

"Go!" exclaimed Allan. "Before you have told me what you want me to do?"

SHE dropped the pistol and straightened a piece of paper she had been clutching in her left hand. With a movement of contempt she tossed it toward him. It fell at Allan's feet and he picked it up and read it.

"Sign that," she ordered, "and then go."

"A confession that I am not the right man?" he exclaimed. "Why, Miss Green, don't you know that your father's attorney asked me to sign something like this long ago, and I consented, but that he decided it would do no good unless you would name the right man?"

"What business is it of anyone's *who* the right man is!" said Ethel in agonized exasperation.

"You have made it everyone's business," said Allan quietly. "You sought publicity and you found it."

He tore up the piece of paper and threw it in the fireplace.

Again Ethel raised the pistol, but she failed to aim it.

"This is my father's pistol," she warned, "not the toy weapon that I used first. And it is not loaded with blank cartridges."

"You have informed me of that," said Allan quietly. "And I beg that you will not hesitate, if you really wish to kill me. It would be a humane act. Not only is my life drab and drear beyond human endurance, but I love you—hopelessly. You will be doing me a favor if you pull the trigger."

The weapon drooped in Ethel's hand.

"You love me," she said. "Why?"

"Because I recognize beneath your supposed dullness a tremendous fineness, a great innocence, a loving, gentle nature. I only wish to help you. Please believe me, Miss Green. I realize that being branded with a cheap, common fellow like me must be maddening for you. But I do not see that killing me now will mend the

matter. The blank cartridge had consequences you did not like—think what the bullet would have."

Ethel stood swaying as if she would fall. She put out her hand to steady herself.

"I can't think," she said. "I have suffered so."

"I know," said Allan in a very tender voice. "Not only since you fired at me, but for months, for years before. I saw you when you bought that lovely frock you are wearing. You brought it to the door of Wells's shop to get a good light on the color—perhaps to show the other girls passing by that even if they did not invite you to their parties they could not afford to buy such gowns as you could.

"I bought these evening clothes in the same spirit; so you see how I can understand you. But both of us bought these things, hoping secretly in our hearts that someone would invite us somewhere some day where we could wear them. Tonight we are wearing them for the first time."

Ethel glanced down at her pretty dress; again the color of anger flamed in her cheeks! That anyone should know, should have suspected even, the agony of her loneliness. She backed toward a little desk beside the fireplace.

"There is more paper here," she said. "Write the confession that you think proper and you may leave the house. I give you five minutes——"

The pistol was raised threateningly again.

Allan crossed promptly to the desk.

"I shall be glad to write whatever you dictate," he said. "But you must permit me to say that you have told me the name of the man you intended to shoot, if this thing is to do any good."

FOR a moment Ethel wavered. Then she blurted out:

"I can't tell you, for there was no one else. I did intend to shoot at you. You were right. I wanted to attract attention to myself. I wanted to prove that I was not a dull, uninteresting person—that I had the courage, at least, to go to great lengths—that I was the heroine of an affair.

"I chose you, and said you were the wrong man, because I thought that, as my father's employee, you would not dare to do anything to me. And I thought the affair would wind up as a nine days' wonder, during which the old gossips of this town would credit me with other men. It was a wild, crazy idea. I expect I have been half mad from lack of the kind of companionship I wanted——"

"Yes," said Allan, "that is the truth. I know it. And also, my dear, innocent, little child, you were half mad about a man who has the reputation for caring only for fast girls. You hoped to prove to him that you were the fastest girl in town.

"Well, you achieved your object. Tonight when I showed him the bad check he had given for sodas showered upon the kind of girl he likes, he told me he would never get into trouble over it, for your father had asked him to marry you."

Allan had been bending over the desk while he said this, and now he began to write upon the pad that Ethel had pulled forward for him. Before he had finished the second sentence, he felt a firm hand upon his arm.

"Wait," she said. "What do you mean?"

Allan swung around in his chair; he was smiling rather triumphantly as he did so, but when he saw Ethel's face he sprang up and caught her in his arms.

"Dear little girl," he exclaimed, "I have been a brute. But you goaded me into this bluntness. Put the pis-

tol away; you'd never shoot me. I really love you—you can't hurt anyone who really loves you. I know you'll never speak to me again, but don't, don't marry Herbert Mansfield. He doesn't care for anything but your father's money. Believe me."

The girl made no reply, but she did not attempt to extricate herself from Allan's embrace for quite a few moments.

"I have adored you so," he pleaded. "Can't you find it in your heart to forgive the unkind things I have said tonight?"

Ethel pushed him gently away and dropped the pistol on the desk.

"Wait," she said. "Let me think. Let me think."

She walked to one of the deeply cushioned divans beside the fireplace and sank down, hiding her face in her hands for a moment. Allan stood in front of her, respectfully distant, his heart in his throat. He had risked everything—had he won or lost?

Presently Ethel looked up and smiled at him.

"You haven't said unkind things," she told him. "You have said true things. You have made me understand you—and the man I thought I loved. I should say the creature.

"I don't believe I could ever really love anything but a decent man. I didn't mind his being fast with other women. I hoped that when at last he was attracted by me that would end. I was mad about him—I admit."

"I know. I understand all that," said Allan eagerly. "Why, if you preferred thieves to honest men, I would rob every bank in Greyville. But the object of *my* love is a worthy one."

Ethel smiled, her lips still quivering, though.

"And the object of mine was unworthy," she said, a little bitterly. She rose and went toward the door, unlocking it and calling for Robert.

"Tell my father and his guest that I should like to see them here and at once," she said to the servant as he promptly appeared.

"WHAT are you going to do?" asked Allan in some dismay.

"I am going to tell them the truth," she said, holding out her hands to him, "that I shot the right man."

"You mean—you will marry me?"

Allan took her hands in his, but held her off, looking at her incredulously.

"If you don't mind," said Ethel. "I want *my* love to be a worthy one, too."

Then as he began raining kisses on her little hands, she went on happily:

"We're just quiet, gentle little things, fond of long evenings over good books, long mornings in the kitchen garden.

"Only we want someone else there, too. Someone who understands. Neither of us can stand loneliness. We're so awfully human. Don't let me be lonely any more."

"Oh, my darling," sighed Allan. "I am only afraid you will forget *me* some day."

"Greyville," laughed Ethel, "would never let me, even if I were inclined to. But I don't believe I shall ever be able to get you out of my heart."

Chiron, The Archer

The Legend of the Cover Design.

THE ancient Greeks had a good time! They kept themselves pretty well amused with their legendary heroes and animals. When they tired of the old ones they made new ones. That's the way the Centaurs happened.

These Centaurs, as pictured on the cover, were part horse and part man, the man's body from head to hips being substituted for the head and neck of the horse.

Most of the stories credit this fanciful beast with good characteristics. This was due either to the love which the Greeks had for the horse or for variety, because none of their other mythical animals were so blest.

And so it became customary to allow the Centaurs to associate with man and many of the legends surrounding them are closely linked with the heroes of those days.

Chiron seems to have been the most famous of these animals. Since he was taught by Apollo and Diana, he was past-master of archery, hunting, medicine, music and the art of prophecy.

In fact, he was so wise that many of the popular heroes, and even one of Apollo's sons, were said to have been entrusted to his care as infants and to have received their education under his tutelage. Among the heroes taught by Chiron were Hercules, Jason, and Achilles.

The best of authorities claim that Hercules was responsible for Chiron's departure from this earth. Hercules had a battle with the Centaurs and somehow Chiron was hit by one of his arrows.

These arrows had been poisoned with the venom of the Hydra and although Hercules sorrowfully pulled out the arrow and treated the wound with a powerful magic medicine given to him by Chiron himself, the effects of the poison could not be overcome.

And so the beloved Chiron, being immortal and unable to die, crawled away to a cave. In his agony he entreated Zeus for relief. Being a good sport, Zeus answered his prayers and placed him in the heavens as the Constellation Sagittarius, which means "The Archer."

FRED. T. EVERETT.

Try Your Luck

By SINCLAIR GLUCK

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

Lights glitter; feet thud on the boardwalk; and over all can be heard the wheedling voice of the bally-hoo—at Coney. TRY YOUR LUCK by Sinclair Gluck is a story of the denizens of one of those bizarre little stands with their conglomeration of worthless knick-knacks that add to the gayety. And beneath their apparent brusquerie and carefreeness you hear the dark roar of reality breaking on the beach of life.

CHAPTER I.

SAM MAKES A FIND

A THIN trickle of amusement seekers passed the booth, languidly. Their moist, vacant faces shone in the garish light for a moment and drifted out of sight.

Sam Dubbin mopped his own face, spat without interest in the maneuver and began again:

"Here y'are! Try yer luck!"

A couple of sailors came into sight, their slow movements distinctively lithe in tight trousers, two hard-faced, vivid-lipped girls hanging to their arms.

"Here y'are, mates! Try yer luck! Give the wife a treat!" Sam's tone was half-hearted.

One of the girls giggled lazily. The sailors grinned and moved on. Sam swore under his breath, without conviction.

"Ain't it hot!" muttered Sam Dubbin.

He was struggling with a thin, uneasy little devil of depression that had nothing to do with the temperature this summer night at Coney Island.

His roll, a ten-dollar bill flaunting itself about half a dozen modest ones, failed to bulge his pocket. It was all he had in the world. Business was rotten—legitimate business.

He stirred restlessly and licked

his dry lips. Memories lured him, memories of luxurious lobbies, obsequious bellhops, that little blonde in Milwaukee—

They were brief and comet-like careers, from darkness into darkness again, these memories.

Night, hurried breathing, silence and tension, success and shrewdly planned escape, then the zest of high living beneath the glaring eye of suspicion and pursuit—

The turning point, the loop of these comet-like parabolas, had not varied either; the same old square room, high desk, big, genially contemptuous flatfeet; the same bare corridors, smelling of cheap soap and soapless humanity, the same clang of finality, then the long swing into darkness.

Tonight Sam could visualize this unpleasant conclusion but dimly. It was uncertain and a long way off. On the other hand, he'd like to know who could make a living at *this* game! *He* was not getting away with it.

A GIRL swung into the light of his lamps, slowed down and came to a stop before the booth, eyeing him with concentrated gravity.

"Here y'are, Miss! Try yer luck! Lookit the prizes!" Sam extended a handful of light wooden rings.

The girl moved nearer, ignoring the rings. "Nothing doing," she retorted curtly. "I want a job, working."

Sam withdrew his hand and stared at her. He received an impression of young prettiness behind strain. She was pale. Her lips, drawn into a thin line, parted as she drew breath. Pretty mouth! Nice dresser, too.

But he knew the type, always on guard. Nothing doing was right! He frowned at her.

"Applesauce!" he grunted. "On your way, sister!"

Again the girl drew nearer, until she stood against the counter. She tilted her head a little and he saw her face clearly. She was a swell looking kid all right. Her big dark eyes looked sort of funny—

"Sa-a-y!" she drawled with an effort. "Gimme a chance, will you? Listen a minute, will you?"

Sam laid down the rings. "Awright, kid. Shoot!"

The girl rested her cheap bag on the counter, her long thin fingers kneading it nervously.

"I—I want to work here for a week," she explained. "And I don't want any money! After that you can give me ten a week or I clear out, you to choose. That's all."

Sam studied her. "What's the big idear o' you workin' for nothin'?" he demanded.

"I want a job," she explained. "I want to show you that I'm *worth* ten a week. That's all, see? You—you ain't doing much business, are you?"

Sam's thick brows met. "Say, listen—" he began.

A figure drifted into sight, thin, natty, pale of face, straw hat at a rakish angle, hard, weary eyes intent on the girl. It paused near the corner of the booth. Sam reflected, then glared. The prowler moved on.

Sam rubbed the moist stubble on his heavy jowl in some doubt.

A couple of sailors from the fort along the beach caught sight of the girl, paused, approached the booth. She turned and eyed them. They stared at her, grinned and with cries of extreme terror drifted on to other fields.

"Awright," agreed Sam grudgingly. "Maybe you ain't coo-coo. Come back here and take off yer hat. An' if you try an' pinch any of the stock, Gawd help ya, sister!" He

lifted a flap in the counter and opened the low door beneath it. "Say, what's yer name?"

The girl's eyes had brightened. At his question she hesitated, then advanced again.

"Maisie—Brown," she answered, indifferently.

SAM noted the pause and drew his own conclusions. But she was a good-looker for fair. She might draw business. And the experiment wasn't costing him anything.

For the rest, he could watch her, couldn't he? He wasn't no chicken when it came to con games, though this one was new. But if she slipped anything over on *him*, Sam Dubbin, he'd tell the cock-eyed world that she was *good!*

He watched her now as she slipped her toque from her swirling bobbed curls, looked about for a place to put it and stowed it away under the counter.

He swept her bent figure with a bold eye and approved. But the glance was largely impersonal. It was a part of Sam's philosophy, an important part, not to get himself mixed up with a skirt, close to home.

"Say, Maisie," he drawled as she straightened, feeling his glance, "that frozen face stuff is O. K. when you're out walkin'. But it don't go back here. You wanna attract customers, not scare 'em to death, see?"

Maisie faced him, a touch of fire in her eyes. "You leave that to me!" she answered aggressively. "And—no monkey business, see?"

"Don't worry!" he snorted.

Maisie stared at him for an instant. Then she smiled. She was extremely pretty when she smiled.

"If you stick to that, we'll get on together fine!"

Sam grunted. He was aware that she was taking the initiative out of his hands in some girl way. But it didn't matter. She sure was pretty when she smiled. It did not occur to him that she had not asked his name in return.

A group of young fellows and girls were passing. Maisie picked up a handful of rings.

"Here you are," she called in a surprisingly clear, attractive voice. "Try your luck! Try your luck! Lots of swell prizes—"

The young men halted and turned to look. There is some indefinable quality in a pretty girl's voice that labels her a pretty girl before one sees her.

One of the young men's companions tossed her head and dragged at her escort's arm. But the others were converging on the booth. So she ran forward. Sam grinned at her and extended a dozen rings which she promptly accepted, chattering gaily.

Maisie's method was less direct but surer.

In growing amazement Sam listened to the subtle guying from the girl, all done with a smile, to which the young fellows fell heir.

It pleased the girls with them, appealing to some obscure bond of sex. It left the young men helpless to resist the rings she handed them. They were aware of being guyed, though they lacked skill to navigate such deep, uncharted waters. Yet they were unwilling to retreat before their girl friends.

Mentally Sam rubbed his hands. She was a *find.* (Of course he had found her!) He noted the rapid surge of her breast beneath her flimsy blouse. But nothing else betrayed her nervous excitement. Sure she was a find!

There was a good deal of horseplay as the newcomers tried to throw the light rings over gold watches,

cigarette cases, vanity cases and other lures poised on raised squares of velvet back of the counter.

Several had thrown at once. All were loudly vociferous. Sam had noted the groups of rings they accepted, counting them carefully. Eight lots.

"How much?" one of the young men asked the girl at last.

Sam eased forward, a hint of aggressiveness in his outthrust jaw.

"Fifteen lots in all, gentlemen," he grinned. "That's —lemme see—that's three seventy-five, at two-bits a dozen. An' a prize each fer the ladies!" He laid three or four valueless trinkets on the counter.

FROM his customers rose a swelling chorus of protest.

"Hey, what's the big idea?"

"Come off it!"

"Think we're hicks?"

Sam's jaw grew slightly more pugnacious. He pointed a stubby finger.

"That's right, gentlemen! Three —an' three—an' three—an' four—an' two—that's fifteen, ain't it? Count it up for yerself!" His tone was aggrieved. But it failed to convince anyone.

"We didn't have more'n ten!"

"Not more'n nine!"

"He's tryin' to cheat cha, Bill!"

"Hey, how d'ya get that way?"

Sam leaned on the counter, his face thrust forward invitingly. "Say, listen," he drawled. "You can't get away with that stuff, see? You had those rings an' you're gonna *pay* for 'em—"

One of the young men stepped back and made play to strip off his coat.

"Soak him, Bill," urged another. "He thinks we're a lot of suckers!"

Nervous young fingers plucked at Sam's sleeve.

"You're both wrong," said Maisie clearly. "There were only twelve lots in all. Isn't that right?" She appealed to the young man addressed as Bill, the quietest and oldest of the group.

Bill hesitated, sullen and a little bewildered.

"Did any of you count 'em?" asked Maisie, and smiled.

"We mighta missed a couple," said Bill slowly. "Guess she's right, fellas. Anyhow, here's my buck!" He threw a dollar bill on the counter. "Ain't no use startin' a fight an' gettin' pinched," he added reasonably.

Grumbling a little but glad to follow any leadership out of a ticklish position without losing face, the other two young men separated themselves from a dollar apiece. The group moved off, discussing the matter.

Sam waited until they were out of hearing.

"Say, listen," he growled at length, "that's a nice way to act! You let me down like that again an' you're fired!"

Maisie faced him.

"Oh, is tha-a-at so?" she inquired. "Well, lemme tell you something! I s'pose you didn't happen to notice that cop in front of the Tunnels of Love! But I did! He was watching the whole time. And he was starting this way when I spoke. *I* don't know how many rings they had. But it wasn't *more* than twelve, anyway. And you don't want to get in wrong with the cops, do you?"

Sam glanced quickly toward the so-called Tunnels of Love. A policeman was moving lazily away from it, swinging his club. Sam looked at the girl, closely.

"You're right, sister," he growled. "If them birds get sore at me it'll be all U. P. Thanks, kid. I—"

"I thought so," said Maisie. "And

anyhow, *my* end of this game is going to be run straight!"

Whereat Sam stared at her afresh.

But he made no comment. And presently he picked up the three bills and added them to his roll. The kid *was* a find. And her thoughts were her own. Fat lot he cared what she thought!

CHAPTER II.

GOOD NIGHT

MAISIE had stopped at the booth about eleven o'clock at night. By one o'clock, when Sam put up his wide, wooden shutters, they had taken in some six dollars more, making nine in all since she joined the business. And this was Tuesday, always a poor night.

Watching her, Sam had swung from secret hostility, through suspicion and doubt, to ungrudging approval. Her clear, alluring voice, her pretty face, drew the few available customers to the booth as a flower draws bees.

Once there, her smiles and her ready tongue turned them from furtive observers to customers. She had only one failure, a bibulous individual of the baser sort whom Sam speedily sent upon his way.

The lord of the booth gave her credit, too, only reserving to himself the greater credit of having discovered her. Maisie sensed this attitude and, with feminine wisdom, was content to have it so.

She lingered while he locked the booth. "Want me tomorrow?" she asked as Sam turned.

"Sure!" He took her arm. "Where d'ja hang out, kid?"

Maisie drew clear of him. "None of that!" she warned sharply. "And where I live doesn't matter. I'm strictly business, see? What time tomorrow?"

Sam laughed. "Gonna high-hat me, huh? *All* right! I was only gonna see you home, but shoot yourself. We opens at noon!"

"That's all right, I can see myself home. Good-night."

"'Night," responded Sam indifferently. But he watched her retreating figure idly until she turned a corner and disappeared. *He* didn't want to see her home. Only it might have been a good idea to learn where to find her.

SHE WAS there next day at noon when Sam arrived. She was there other noons, too. And the business boomed.

In two weeks Sam Dubbin had acquired the strut of a successful business man. By this time it was entirely clear to him that Maisie's advent was due to his own business acumen. But he did realize that the success of his booth was due to her. It would not do to lose her.

This conviction brought an increasing urge to learn more about her, where she lived, what her real name was.

Gee, she was pretty! Sam shied away from that thought when it occurred to him, as it did with some frequency. Nice kid, too! Sensible and straight. He knew!

Twice he tried to see her home and was refused. Then he tried following her. But she had been waiting for that.

The first time she stopped, told him quietly not to follow her and waited until he took himself out of sight. The second time she turned on him like a little tigress.

"Following me again, are you?" she shrilled, her clear voice quivering with passion. "You get out of here, Sam Dubbin! Beat it or I'll yell for a cop! Go on! Go on! Beat it! Think I'm easy, do you?" She

drew closer, trembling. "For two pins—"

Sam retreated. He saw that she had misunderstood his motive—or had she? Well, of course she had! He was stricty business, too, was Sam.

He didn't like the look in her eyes. In a dull way he was sorry to have brought it there.

"Sa-a-ay, listen!" he drawled uneasily. "You got me wrong, kid! I didn't mean nothing o' that."

"Yes, you didn't! What did you follow for then?"

"Well, it wasn't that, kid."

She stamped her foot. "All right! What was it?"

In a corner, Sam turned. "Say!" he shouted, "what's all the mystery about? You didn't gimme your real name! I dunno where you live! I dunno nothin' about you! You could beat it any day an' not come back no more—"

Maisie studied him, indifferent to the curious glances of passing pedestrians.

"Oh, that was it!" she said at last. "Well, I ain't going to give you my name, nor where I live, see? Now beat it, Sam Dubbin!"

More conscious than she that their raised voices had attracted attention, Sam hesitated, then turned slowly away. "See you t'morra, kid?" he ventured.

"If you leave me now."

"All right. G'night."

"Goodnight."

CHAPTER III.

FED-UP AND A ROLL

HE LEFT her and started for his own home in a sullen rage. But by the time he reached his dingy rooming house anger had given way to apprehension. Suppose she didn't come back!

He was amazed at the pang that swept over him, amazed and angry again. She wasn't the only skirt in the world, was she?

Maybe she had helped the business. But so would another! Not even to himself would he admit that his apprehension was not any longer a question of business.

He opened his booth quite early next day. As the noon hour approached he grew more and more uneasy.

But she came—on the minute. She bade him a smiling good morning with her usual impersonal inflection. Sam was too relieved to wonder at her readiness to come back to him.

Morning had brought counsel—of a sort. This was payday. Without comment he handed her twelve dollars instead of ten.

"What's the idea?" demanded Maisie.

"That's your salary, kid," he told her nonchalantly.

She stared at him, suspicion in her eyes and in the lines of her tense body. "What's the idea?" she repeated stonily.

Sam lost his temper. "That's your salary!" he roared. "Take the wax outa yer ears!"

Maisie relaxed. Then she could—and had—hurt *him! Sam!*

"You mean I've earned it?" she murmured, docilely.

"Sure, that's what I mean!" he growled. "Think I'm tryin' ter buy you now, wit' two dollars?"

"All right." She stowed the money away in her bag, then turned frank eyes on him. "Thanks. Guess you're a good scout, Sam, after all! And don't worry. I won't quit!"

Sam grunted and turned his attention to business.

THE EARNINGS of the little booth continued to increase as Maisie

learned the tricks of the trade and devised new ones. Sam spent a morning at the booth installing a cash drawer under the counter which would enable them to make change more readily.

Maisie's salary had grown to fifteen dollars a week and a fifty-fifty split on earnings over a certain amount. A new and more alluring line of prizes stirred cupidity in the passerby. Sam blossomed forth in a new suit of vivid brown with a pink shirt.

Maisie thawed into faintly cautious comradeship.

THE Saturday before Mardi Gras week was clear and hot, the best sort of weather for business.

Sam woke at nine, cocked an eye at the weather and sprang out of bed. He shaved quickly, got into his new suit, absorbed a hasty breakfast at a one-arm joint on Sixth Avenue and set off for the Island. The crowds would begin to trickle down there early today, as he knew.

He found a corner place in the Sea Beach Express, settled back in it and opened his paper with the grunt of a strenuous business man.

He had cleaned up this summer. He'd make a lot more today and Sunday and in the coming week. Pretty soft!

Presently the letters ran into a blur before his eyes. After all, a guy *was* a dumb-bell to stay crooked when he could make a good thing of it going straight! Of course the old life was exciting and all that. But this was better!

One thing, though. He was fed-up with living in one-arm joints. And that room of his was enough to give anybody the dumps. This roosting alone in a dirty rooming-house was all right for dips and yeggs, maybe. But he was a business man now.

His hand stole unobtrusively to the fat roll he always carried. It gave a guy a sense of confidence, having a roll. . . .

Funny how he had drifted out of the old gang!

Maybe a little place somewhere—out Jamaica way—and somebody to look after and bully a little and scrap with and show a good time to—somebody to impress. . . .

Sam tried to concentrate on his paper again, with a gesture of impatience mixed with futility, but in a moment the letters blurred again.

. . . Somebody you could *count* on—somebody with whom you came first in the world and who came first with you. . . .

CHAPTER IV.

UNDERTONES

HE REACHED the island to find a record crowd already gathering. He opened the booth at once, though it was only eleven, and did a little business.

As the hour of noon approached he began to glance at the tiny mirror Maisie had installed in a corner of the booth. He looked pretty fair—been getting more sleep then he used to. This suit was a good buy! Oh, well, maybe he wasn't no chorus man for looks! But he was strong. A good guy in a scrap and plenty strong enough to take care of—

Noon came with Sam rather dreading its arrival. It passed with Sam anxiously dreading its departure. This was a big day. And for once Maisie was late.

By half past twelve Sam was feeling sarcastic. One o'clock found him restless with rage and anxiety. By half past one he was bitter and sullen. She'd canned the job!

Just before two o'clock she swung

round a corner and entered the booth. His huge relief expressed itself in characteristic fashion.

"Say," he growled, not looking at her, "you're a hot sketch, you are! Maybe ya didn't know it was Saturday, huh?"

"Sure! I don't know anything," answered Maisie wearily. "Sorry I'm late, Sam!"

He turned to look at her. Her shoulders drooped this morning. Her eyes looked tired, their lids flushed and a little swollen. Sam stared, his face suddenly savage.

"Say, you was up kinda late last night, huh?" he demanded. "Dancin' at one o' them all-night joints, was you? Or maybe you was out ridin', huh?"

He was working himself into a jealous fury, but his voice dropped to an insinuating undertone. "Who's the lucky guy, kid? I'd like to meet up wit' him—"

Maisie turned away toward the back of the booth. "I wasn't out with anyone last night," she answered in a low voice. "I was up late at home—"

Sam moved to where she stood and touched her arm.

"What'sa matter, kid?" he muttered. "Somebody been treatin' you rough? Who is it, kid? Where's he live?"

"It—ain't that," came her muffled response. "It's just—a row at home, Sam. Leave me alone, will you? I'll be all right in a minute."

HE WAITED a moment and then turned reluctantly away. He was angry. He was tongue-tied. He was battling with a furious impulse to comfort her by squeezing the breath out of her.

But that was impossible. They were in the full view of the passing public. Nor would he dare. There was nothing he could do.

Maisie was fumbling in her cheap bag. She drew out a diminutive handkerchief, wiped her eyes with it and then blew her nose. There was something pluckily forlorn about these feminine ways that wrenched his heart.

Some time later the inspiration came. He had seen a little wrist-watch in a jeweler's window. It was a beaut! The guy was a fence and Sam knew it. It would cheer up *any* girl. And Maisie didn't have one.

His hand stole down to the pocket where he carried his roll of bills. The pocket was empty. Of course! He had put them in the cash drawer when he opened the booth. He sidled over to the counter.

"Say, Maisie, I got a 'pointment, see? You run the booth for an hour, kid. Maybe I'll be back before that."

He opened the drawer and began taking out the money, tens, fives and ones from their different compartments.

Maisie was watching him. Suddenly she gave a high-pitched, nervous laugh. "Be sure and get it all, Sam, or I might pinch two-bits while you're gone!"

He turned to stare at her. "Say, what's bitin' you?"

"Nothing ain't biting me," she answered, watching him. "I'm just warning you, Sam!"

He continued to stare, puzzled at her tone. Then he solemnly selected two ten-dollar bills and replacing the rest of the money closed the drawer.

"You don't have to get up on yer ear with me, kid," he told her. "It was jes' habit, takin' the money out."

He picked up his hat, lifted the counter lid and moved out into the street, conscious that the girl was

watching him intently. But she said nothing more. And Sam moved away out of sight without looking back.

CHAPTER V.

TOBOGGANING

IN LESS than an hour he returned to the booth to find a policeman with his back against the counter, his truncheon swinging and thumping against the wooden front of it. He saw Sam and stood erect.

"Hey, you! What is the big idea, huh?" he demanded. "You an' that good-lookin' skirt o' yours think I got nothin' else to do but watch your joint?"

Sam grunted his surprise, staring into the empty booth. "Where's she gone? I left her in charge—"

"Yeah," growled the policeman, "'Bout a hour ago! I saw ya! An' a couple uv minutes later she calls me over an' tells me that she's gotta put in a long distance call an' will I watch the booth for her, while she's gone. She must be phonin' Alaska, keepin' me hangin' aroun' here for a hour!"

"Why, I left her in charge!" repeated Sam. "I dunno no more'n you why she ain't back. Here, come in a minnit."

The policeman followed him through the counter, with a perfunctory grumble. A bill changed hands. The policeman left the booth again and strolled away, his club swinging, a slightly more rakish angle to his cap.

Left alone, Sam stared around the booth, then looked under the counter. Her hat and bag were gone.

He leaned forward to look up and down the crowded street. Into his consciousness had crawled a little snake of doubt. He tried to choke it, but it squirmed free. With an oath he stepped back and opened the cash drawer.

Beneath his fingers lay two five-dollar bills, two ones and some small change. There had been a hundred and fifty dollars in his roll. About an even hundred dollars was missing—

A few papers lay jumbled at the back of the drawer. Sam pawed them over at random. But there was no money there.

He closed the drawer again, slowly.

The cop had been watching ever since she left. Nobody but Maisie could have got at the drawer. It was "open and shut."

"Stung!" he whispered.

After a moment he laughed harshly. Sam, the wise guy, stung by a skirt!

He licked his dry lips. He had to give her credit, at that! She'd played him for a sucker like an old hand at the game!

SO the surface of his mind.

Deeper, among the more obscure processes of his being, something that had been young and fresh and shy was withering, dying. He was sick with the pain of it.

Gawd, what a sucker he'd been! Why, she'd even *warned* him! How she musta laughed!

The last thought pierced to his vitals. He squirmed with the sting of her ridicule.

His face convulsed with fury, Sam thrust his hand into his pocket and snatched forth a little box. He opened it with trembling fingers, caught up the little gold wristwatch and bracelet it contained and made as though to fling them against the wall of the booth.

But his uplifted arm descended again. He laughed abruptly. Leaning forward, he arranged the watch

on the center of the counter as a lure *de luxe*. Then he straightened, staring down at the shining thing.

"If she'd 'a' waited," he muttered, "she coulda had that, too! Oh, what a sucker *I've* been!"

SAM'S business that afternoon was almost nil.

Half an hour after he returned he looked up from his thoughts to see an old friend, one Slim Burke, leaning on the counter. He nodded shortly, studying the dissipated young face and shifty eyes.

Slim leaned closer. Sam moved slowly to meet him. Their heads remained close together for a matter of two or three minutes.

At first Sam growled a negative. Then he began to nod slowly. At length Slim straightened, turned and slipped away into the crowd.

After that Sam made no attempt to attract customers, which was one reason why he did no business.

Now and then people would pause at the booth. But their eyes would stray to Sam's face and they would move on quickly. They were out for a good time, not looking for trouble!

This was the other reason why Sam did no business.

Just after eleven, Slim Burke approached the booth again and leaning far over the counter whispered a few words out of the corner of his mouth. Sam nodded and Slim moved off to wait.

And now, though the business of the Island was at its height and pickings were at their best, Sam began to put up his shutters. A few minutes later the booth was closed for the night, Sam had joined the loiterer and the two of them had drifted away out of sight.

From a business point of view, Sunday is an even better day than Saturday at Coney Island, especially in the afternoon. But Sam did not open his booth until after two o'clock.

Even then he sat back on a box, like a spider in its web, silent and ominous, a lowering frown on his face. If the frown hid a sullen anxiety the fact was not apparent to the shuffling pleasure-seekers who paused and passed on.

He did almost no business but cared little, his mind being amply occupied elsewhere. Now and then he stared out at the passing crowds. There was an old, feverish glint in his eyes that had not been there for weeks. He was tobogganing on the down grade. He knew it. He didn't care at all.

Abruptly he looked up, stared incredulously and with a roar of anger leapt to his feet. In front of the counter, facing him, stood Maisie.

CHAPTER VI.

SAM GETS A JOLT

SAM lurched forward and caught her by the wrist.

"Where's the money you pinched?" he bellowed.

The girl made no attempt to free herself, though she could have screamed with the pain of his grip. She merely studied him with sullen eyes. Sam saw that she was drawn and white with fatigue. But he felt no pity now.

"Where's that hundred iron men?" he snarled.

"Let go of me. I'm coming in."

Sam released her wrist slowly, then lifted the counter. When she had passed through into the booth he caught her by the arm. "Why did you pinch that hundred bucks from me?" he demanded hoarsely. "Why did you, huh?"

Maisie opened her bag and took out a little bundle of folded notes.

"There's your money, Sam. What you going to do about it?" Her tone was utterly indifferent.

He flipped through the bills, saw that they were all there, then stared at her white face. Some strong emotion had him by the throat. He thought it was anger.

"Hell's bells!" he roared, "what's the matter with you? Are you coo-coo? What's the idea uv double-crossin' me an' then bringing back the kale? I don't get ya!"

Maisie had taken off her hat and put it under the counter, her movements listless and tired. Now suddenly she stiffened and swung round on him, her eyes blazing.

"*You* don't get me!" she shrilled. "Well, it's all *your* fault, Sam Dubbin! You—you crook! For all I could do, I guess you've won!"

Her body was shaking with dry sobs, now, her pretty face distorted. But she did not turn away. "When —when I got home," she gasped, "he was *gone!*"

There was an infinity of woe in the last word.

"What—what's eatin' you?" demanded Sam.

"Where were *you* last night?" shrilled the girl.

Sam sprang forward. "Shut that!" he muttered.

Maisie drooped again suddenly. "You ain't telling me anything I don't know," she sobbed. "Oh, Sam, *why* couldn't you keep on going straight?"

Sam was close to her now, a dawning comprehension in his eyes.

"*Who* was gone?"

"My brother—Slim!" she whispered desolately. "He was *gone!* I looked everywhere for him. But I couldn't find him. Then I came back here. But the booth was closed—before midnight! So I knew! Oh, Sam, *why* couldn't you go straight?"

Sam shook her arm gently. "Was that why ya pinched the money, kid? Was that why you came down here in the first place?"

Maisie nodded her head, now bowed in her hands.

"I was going to pay it back, Sam. I was going to work it off if you'd let me. But I just *had* to have it!"

He slipped his arm about her waist. "Why, kid?"

"He was broke. He couldn't get work. I tried to make him go straight, but he loved the excitement. And he was nuts about you. So I came here to watch you. I thought if I could make the booth go it would keep you straight and that would keep him straight, see, Sam? But he was gone and then you were gone —and—" She burst into a storm of bitter tears and drew clear of his arm.

Sam followed.

"But listen, kid, why didn't you tell me your name was Burke? Why didn't you tell me about Slim? I'd ha' gone straight if I'd known! But when you pinched the money I thought you'd played me fer a sucker, see, Maisie, an' I didn't care no more. Why did you pinch the money, kid?"

"He—he said he had to have a hundred dollars," she gasped. "I t-told him I'd try and get it and he *s-swore* he'd wait for me until six. But when I got back home with it he was gone! He was gone! And I couldn't find him anywhere!"

Sam caught her arm and swung her round. "Look, kid, that's why I left yestiddy. I went to get you that! Pretty, ain't it? But when I got back *you* was gone!"

Maisie peered down at the bracelet and watch through her tears.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, I didn't know! Oh, Sam, it's lovely!"

She started to pick up his gift.

Then she hesitated, gasped and clutched his arm. "Sam, I knew he'd gone on a job! And his gat was gone? Oh, God, did you *kill* anyone?"

"Shut it, kid!" whispered Sam sharply. "Naw, we didn't shoot nobody. We didn't make no haul, either. But we both made a clean getaway, kid. So that's all right."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROAD TO JAMAICA

SAM GLANCED around as he spoke. A figure had slipped into view at the end of the booth. But its owner was staring furtively over his shoulder and failed to catch Sam's swift gesture of warning. Maisie saw it and looked up.

"Slim! Slim!" she cried. "Oh, Slim, *why* did you—"

Sam checked her with a hand on her arm and turned on his confederate. "Get outa here, ya fool!" he barked urgently. "Ain't you got no sense *a-tall?* Beat it!"

His voice died away to a mutter. For another figure, that of a huge fellow in plain clothes, had ranged itself by Slim and was gazing genially at Sam. Maisie gasped and started to speak but Sam squeezed her arm for silence.

"Why, if it ain't Bull Donovan!" he said easily. "'Lo, Bull. What's new with you, huh?"

"Why, *hello*, Sam!" returned the big man. "Ain't nothing much new. I just dropped round to take you for a little walk, Sam!"

He raised ponderous eyebrows at Slim, who was trying to smile. "An' seein' you got a frien' here, why, I guess we'll all three take a little walk, Sam," he added genially.

Like a flash, Slim turned and darted away. From beyond the radius of his lights Sam caught the sound of a brief scuffle.

In a moment Slim was back again. His hands were twisted behind him and pinioned there by a policeman who had been waiting in the shadows.

Slim's face was white and set, for he realized that he had capped one blunder with a greater. Maisie stood staring at him with miserable, despairing eyes.

"Why, what's up, Bull?" inquired Sam, reproachfully. "What you want *me* for? What you lagged Slim for?"

The big detective laughed.

"Just to take a walk, like I said, Sam. I want you to tell the beak where you was last night, you an' Slim. Too bad Cassidy happened along an' disturbed you last night—you an' Slim. You didn't get much, did you! Too bad, Sam!" he commiserated. "You mighta made a fine haul. Well, better luck next time! We can tell your work every time, Sam!"

"What you talkin' about, Donovan? Why, me an' the kid here was in the booth until after one o'clock last night—"

"Nix now, nix!" Donovan laughed. "This joint was closed at eleven when Dugan came by. An' it *stayed* closed. An' I didn't say nothin' about what *time* you broke into Levinstein's place, did I? It mighta been after *two* o'clock for all *you* know, Sam, unless you was there yerself, see? An' we know your work, Sam. An' Slim always tags along wit' you, don't he?"

Maisie sprang forward to face the detective, who retreated in mock alarm. She was white to the lips.

"That's a lie!" she cried fiercely. "He wasn't! They didn't! Sam an' I were here until two o'clock and when I got home Slim was in bed! He's my brother—"

Again Donovan laughed. "Slim's sister, eh?" He studied her admiringly. "We-e-ell," he drawled, "you can tell the judge any yarn you like, girlie! An' maybe he'll fall for it!"

He turned reproachfully on Sam. "Come on, Sam, old pal! I don't wanna have to get rough wit' an ol' frien', see?"

SAM picked up his hat. Too much had been said already. Then he looked at Maisie.

The girl was staring at her white-faced brother, her own face bitter with despair. He moved close to Donovan, so that the policeman would not hear.

"Look here, Bull," he growled, "I'll come clean. Maybe you got the goods on me an' maybe you haven't. But I'll come clean anyway. I done the job, see? But I done it *alone*! Slim wasn't in it *a-tall*. He was home in bed, like the kid says. He's been goin' straight, see? The kid, here, saw to that! An' that's the Gawd's truth, Bull! Do you get me?"

The big detective hesitated. He had caught the menace back of the desperately urgent tone of his prisoner. Sam would not be "up" for very long and Sam would be a dangerous enemy. After all, a whole skin was better than heroics, if he made his cop. He glanced into Maisie's wide eyes.

"You mean that, Sam? You'll stick to it?"

"I ain't never double-crossed a frien' yet, Bull!"

"*All* right, Sam!" chuckled the detective. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush—an' we ain't got such an ironclad case, though it's pretty fair at that."

He turned and nodded to the uniformed policeman. Slim, set free, whirled and slipped away into the curious crowd that had collected before the booth.

Sam lifted the flap of the counter and stepped into the street. Maisie fumbled for her hat and started to follow but he saw and waved her back.

"I'm coming with you," she sobbed.

"No, you ain't," Sam snapped at her. "Ye're gonna stay here an' run the business, kid, see?"

MAISIE hesitated, then turned to Donovan. "Can I speak to him a minute, please?"

"Sure, kid, help yourself," nodded the detective genially. "By the way, I s'pose it wasn't *you* that pulled the job, while them two was tucked up in their little beds?" he questioned teasingly.

Sam stepped slowly back into the booth and Maisie drew him close to her.

"Sam!" she whispered.

Sam looked down into her upturned face and had a vague conception of Heaven and angels and a little place out Jamaica way.

"Oh, hell!" growled Sam, and suddenly caught her in his arms and and kissed her hungrily.

Then, very deliberately, he set her free and turned.

"All right, Bull!" he muttered.

Detective Donovan and his prisoner disappeared through the crowd. Some of it melted away in pursuit. But some of it remained.

Maisie gulped once or twice and turned to face a hundred curious eyes.

"Here you are!" she called shakily. "Try your luck! Try your luck!"

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Of course, it was impossible to sell this remarkable pen through the stores. Their profit alone on a $7.00 or $8.75 pen *is more than what you actually pay for the POSTAL RESERVOIR PEN.* And so we decided to let Uncle Sam do the selling for us—through the United States mails.

The Pen That Says "Fill Me Up!" When Empty

The POSTAL RESERVOIR PEN (named POSTAL because it is sold by mail only) is distinctive in design and contains features which are not found in any other pen. It is transparent, so you can always see when it needs filling. It is self-filling—employs an entirely new method, the easiest ever devised. Holds 3 to 4 times more ink than any other self-filling pen. Manufactured from same materials as used in highest priced pens. Never before have so many improvements and refinements been combined in a single, handsome, smooth-writing, never-clogging pen that you will be proud to own and delighted to use.

Read These Amazing Features of the Postal Pen

It is Transparent—You can always see exactly how much ink you've got. Can't run unexpectedly dry.

It is Unbreakable—You can even step on it without injuring it. A wonderful pen for red-blooded men.

It's the Smoothest Writing Pen You Ever Saw—Big, solid 14-Karat gold point, tipped with the finest iridium.

It is Self-Filling—The easiest of all pens to fill.

It Holds 3 to 4 Times More Ink Than Any Other Self-filling Pen—Fill it once a month—and get real "writing mileage."

And Remember—The materials and workmanship are guaranteed to be equal or superior to those found in **any** other pen, whether sold at $7.00, $8.75 or more.

How to Get the Postal Pen
SEND NO MONEY

Simply fill in and mail the coupon. Do not send a penny! When you get your Postal Pen, you will also receive 5 post cards, each worth 50c on the purchase price of another pen. Every Postal Pen owner finds that his friends admire his remarkable pen and ask where they can get others like it. You can easily sell your premium post cards for 50c each and earn back the full price of your pen. You *do not* have to sell the cards—dispose of them any way you wish—whatever you make on them is yours to keep.

Five Days' FREE Trial

Send for your POSTAL pen NOW. State whether you want men's or women's model. Use it five days and if you are not delighted with it return it and your money will be promptly refunded. You are to be the sole judge. Compare it with *any* pen at *any* price. *Remember the price is low only because our sales policy of manufacturer-to-user eliminates all in-between profits, commissions and handling.* Send the coupon NOW and learn what real fountain pen satisfaction is.

POSTAL PEN CO., Inc.
Desk 148, 41 Park Row, New York City

Please send me one Postal Reservoir Pen, and five special Premium Postcards which I may give away or dispose of at 50c each. I will pay postman $2.50 upon receipt of the pen. If after five days' use I desire to return the Postal Pen, you agree to refund purchase price. Send me the model I have checked. ☐Men's model. ☐Women's model.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

If you live outside the United States send International Money Order.

Postal
RESERVOIR PEN
Desk 148, 41 Park Row, New York City

Actual Size is larger than this

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